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TEACHERS' AND PARENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT OF PLAY IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
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To my beloved husband, Rafdhy...
My children, Wafie, Khaulah, Nubha
For their love and company
And
To my father and my late mother
May Allah bless and grant upon them mercy
Forever and ever...

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations that based on my own original work and has not been previously submitted for a degree at another university or used for publication elsewhere.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Author or authors bearing Malaysian name/s is/are printed in their customary form, as used in *Encyclopaedia of Malaysia* (1998), i.e. first name followed by surname.

Abbreviations used in the texts or sources of cited materials are minimal and in most cases are explained in the text immediately after they are mentioned. Some abbreviations are used at the discretion of the author. For abbreviation not in common use, the terms are given in full when the abbreviation is first used followed by the abbreviation in brackets.

Videotape of 'Visits & Observation' is available for the author.

ABSTRACT

This study is set in the context of an increasing awareness of the need for and importance of quality play learning experience for pre-school children owing to its crucial role and great contributions to various aspects of child development. The main aim of this study is to examine teachers' and parents' perspectives on play and their understanding of the role of play in relation to children's learning particularly in pre-school practice. Teachers' perceptions of play were described and analysed with respect to their definition of play, roles and values of play in relation to children's learning, and the use of play in teaching. Parents' understandings of the concept of play were examined through their perception on play as pedagogical tools and their preference for pre-school learning activities.

The conceptual framework derived from international literature including that of Malaysia informed formulation of the research questions. Two methods of data collection were deployed. First, semi-structured in-depth face-to face interviews were carried out on 30 pre-school teachers, 30 parents, 15 administrators, 12 children and one policy maker. Secondly, observation based on a category system was undertaken in 15 pre-schools across five different types of settings: Unity Department government-based pre-schools (Tadika Perpaduan), Muslim Youth Movement NGO pre-schools (TASKI ABIM), Selangor State Religious Department pre-schools (TAKIS JAIS), university-based pre-schools and private pre-schools.

The findings of the study imply that:

- (i) There was a mismatch between teachers' understanding of the word play in child development and play in relation to educational program of the children.
- (ii) Only few parents considered play to be the appropriate way of children's learning. Most of them preferred a formal learning environment for their children's pre-school activities.
- (iii) Play activities tended not to provide learning experiences of acceptable quality in most of the settings and many pre-school teachers taught children in a very formal way.
- (iv) There was no evidence of systematic differences between the philosophy and type of settings in respect to play understanding. The differences are the level of the teachers' knowledge, professional training and academic qualifications.
- (v) Mainly there were four main factors concluded as impeding the progress of deploying play in Malaysian pre-school practice: conceptual barriers, attitudinal barriers, structural barriers and functional barriers.

As a result of the findings, some implications have been advocated concerning the need for rethinking the practice in Malaysian pre-schools for improving the approach to educating young children by giving play its central role in children's learning and free from academic stress. This study has to some extent contributed as one kind of interdisciplinary knowledge in integrating a meeting point between a western worldview and Islamic fundamental beliefs regarding play roles in children's education. Also it has contributed to a greater understanding of the problems associated with the implementation of learning through play in the Malaysian pre-school context that specifically reflects the current Malaysian Education System which is exam-oriented.

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

Play is children's natural tendency and widely regarded as providing a rich context for children's learning in the field of early childhood education. A commitment to play has underpinned many traditional approaches to early childhood curriculum. During play, children examine and refine their learning in light of the feedback they receive from the environment and other people. It is through play that children develop their imagination and creativity.

Many educationalists have concluded that the most valuable learning comes through play, through which children add to their knowledge of the world. Themes theories (Bennett et. al, 1997) indicate that play is considered to have a special role in learning and is distinguished from teacher-directed activities or work. Taken altogether, the ideas from the early educators such as Owen, Froebel, Montessori, Steine, Vygotsky, Piaget, McMillan and Isaacs, and current experts in early childhood education provide a powerful argument for the use of play in promoting children's development and learning. The works of Moyles (1989), Bruce and her re-framed ten bedrock principles (1997), and the teachers in Bennett's study (1997) revealed the same notion and proved that play has been recognised as an appropriate approach to young children learning.

Meanwhile, in an Islamic worldview, play is also considered as a valuable approach in educating young children. The contribution of play to child development and education are acknowledged and recognised by early Muslim educators and philosophers such as Avicenna (1038), Al-Ghazali (1111), Ibn Sahnun (870) and Ibn Qayyim Al Jauziah (1350)

1.1 Pre-school Education in the Malaysian Context

Malaysia's Vision 2020 is an attempt to steer the nation towards achieving the status of a fully developed and industrialised country. All efforts are channelled towards becoming a fully united nation and a democratic society that is strong in religious and spiritual values as well as a society that is liberal and tolerant, scientific progressive, innovative, and forward looking. In line with the nation's aspiration, the Ministry of Education of Malaysia (MOE) has further set its mission from 'education' for all' to 'education for excellence' whereby the development of human resources, the talents, skills and creativity of the people is the ultimate goal.

It is undeniable that the rapid growth and development in the country as well as the mission and vision toward education have increased the challenge of shaping future generation. Thus, the MOE has formulated the National Education Philosophy, developed an integrated curriculum with the aim of meeting this challenge and producing a 'balanced man'. This philosophy is actually guiding the form of early childhood programme in Malaysia and in translating the goal into reality Malaysia generally based the development of the programme on incorporation of Islamic intellectual thought and western contemporary theories of child development.

In Malaysia, the terms ‘Kindergarten’ or ‘pre-school’ have been used to refer to a half-day programme for children 5 and 6 years old, and in some settings there were provision for 4 years old children. Children below the age of 4 are provided for in childcare centres or taken care of in the home by childminders or caregivers. Childminding in Malaysia is known as home-based childcare. The regulation of pre-school education and its provision was stated formally in the Education Act 1996, chapter 2, pp. 24-25 which was compiled by MDC Legal Advisers (1998). Incidentally, Malaysian government policy towards pre-school was stated clearly in The Seventh Malaysian Plan (1996-2000) as ‘ *a comprehensive policy on pre-school education covering its curriculum, physical facilities and teacher training will be formulated to ensure that at least 65 percent of children in the 5-6 age group receive pre-school education*’ (translated from EPRD, MOE, 1996, pp 5). Accordingly, the plan also stated that the MOE would play a more important role in providing appropriate services for pre-school education.

The current situation as reported by UNESCO (2002) indicates that the Malaysian government is greatly concerned about the inadequacies in its pre-school programs and supportive of efforts to expand the supply of pre-schools and, most importantly, to increase collaboration and co-operation across the several government agencies involved. With a focus on vision 2020 and the nine central strategic challenges, the Government of Malaysia has made a commitment to the promotion of the importance of early childhood, from conception through the early primary grades. Then, in the year 2002, the 1996 Education Act was amended to make pre-school as well as primary school compulsory.

1.1.1 The Pre-school Curriculum in Malaysia

As it was stated in the Education Act 1996 the programmes and activities of every pre-school shall be based on the curriculum guidelines approved by the minister. The pre-school curriculum in Malaysia is based on guidelines developed by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), MOE in 1993 then reformed in 1998. This guideline is the result of a collaborative effort between agencies, which includes the MOE, Ministry of National Unity and Social Development, Prime Minister Department, State Islamic Department, Institutes of Higher Learning, private kindergartens and also authorized individuals. This document for teachers who work with children of four to six years old was based on two main considerations, to provide the children with life experiences in line with their stages of development and to provide them with basic academic and social preparations by the time they enter compulsory education.

A series of curriculum guidance books was published in 1997 by CDC with the aim of assisting pre-school teachers in the planning and implementing of the daily activities based on the needs and overall balanced development of the child. One of the principles of this pre-school education packages programme indicates that learning through play is the key in teaching and learning.

According to the findings of the study on curriculum across the 0-6 age range conducted by Rohaty et al (1996), the Pre-school Curriculum Guidelines (1993) are very comprehensive and well-grounded in child development theory. The researchers conclude that in general, the issue is not the quality of the curriculum available,

difficulties are encountered in its implementation mainly as a result of inadequate training and supervision. This might be the effect of excluding pre-school education from the patronage of the MOE as enjoyed by primary, secondary and tertiary education; an issue highlighted by Ling Chu Poh (1988a).

Recently in December 2001, a new 'National Pre-school Curriculum' was introduced by the MOE. In his speech welcoming the guidelines, the Minister of Education provided encouragement for using and implementing play in classroom practice. He stated, "*...This hope could be achieved by putting emphasis on learning through play approach which is flexible, informal, safe, convenient and enjoyable...*" This new national pre-school curriculum was restructured based on four main principles: the holistic and integrated individual development, fun and enjoyable learning, meaningful context of learning experiences and whole life education.

In relation to that, the Minister of Education made an amendment to Section 24 of the Education Act 1996. According to the new regulations that came into operation on 1st January 2003 every Kindergarten shall use this new curriculum issued by the Register General from time to time at least three hours a day for every schooling day (Utusan Malaysia, 23 Oct 2001)

1.2 Rationale for the Study

The fundamental reason for conducting this study was to investigate teachers' and parents' understanding of the concept of play in child development and education and its impact on the practicality of learning through play (LTP) in pre-school

learning activities. Significantly, in Malaysia there is currently a lack of research available on the evaluation and investigation of the implementation of this approach to learning in pre-school classrooms. There are also very few studies concerned with teachers' knowledge or parents' perception of the concept of play in children's learning process.

An evaluation study conducted by Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD), MOE in collaboration with UNICEF (1990) indicated that many pre-school teachers used a formal teacher-centred approach in teaching the children. The teaching style was found to be inappropriate, and could have a negative effect on the children. In discussing the findings of the study there was a suggestion to find a solution in resolving the problems and a recommendation that the pre-school learning climates need to be reformed.

Meanwhile, in analysing the pre-school dimension towards 21st century and after that, Rohaty (1992) suggested that there should be a further research examining the status and condition of pre-school using observation, ethnographic and qualitative methods which would be carried out firstly by the MOE. Rohaty (1992) also stated that in improving the quality of pre-school education in Malaysia it is necessary to do more research on pre-school learning climates because Malaysia is left behind in terms of accumulating data regarding children's learning climates in pre-school.

Accordingly, a doctoral study conducted by Siti Zaliha (1999), which examined the pre-school teachers' perceptions of play in pre-schools, the provisions of play and constraints faced by the settings in promoting play, recommended some studies to be

carried out for future research. One of the recommendations seen as relevant to this study was to carry out “a study on parents’ and children’s perceptions of play”. Even though this study does not directly address the topic recommended, research on parents’ perceptions conducted as part of this study could provide a broader perspective for understanding the parents’ and children’s needs to help shape the appropriate pre-school learning programme.

This study could describe the actual situation how play is understood by pre-school teachers and how play is allocated in classroom practice across different kind of pre-schools as explained by the teachers themselves. It is assumed that as a result of this study, factors impeding the progress of the implementation of learning through good quality play experiences in Malaysian pre-schools would be recognised. This will help administrators, stakeholders and authorised individuals who are responsible for the pre-school arena to find solutions to resolving the problems.

1.3 Statement of the Problems

Even though play is considered to further learning and development, there are issues of defining what good play is and how such forms of play can be defined as having educational aims. As Moyles (1994,p.3) states:

“Quality links between play and learning seem obvious to many practitioners and parent: yet the dilemma still exists as to whether play can provide any kind of excellence in relation to real learning in early years educational contexts.”

In addition, Smith (1994) views that although most pre-school educators acknowledge the importance of play in early years classrooms and admit the role of

play in children's learning process, they do not use play to teach information and skill.

Meanwhile, Bennett et al (1997) argue that evidence from research on play in preschools and school settings indicates that the rhetoric of play is not realized in practice. Findings from a research project conducted by Keating et al (2000) also demonstrate that there remains a significant amount of confusion about the role that play has in young children's education.

In relation to the Malaysian context, the implementation of LTP approach in pre-schools faces many challenges in incorporating it in the early childhood curriculum. First, children in Malaysian pre-schools are being educated in a formal way and this 'formal world' will not allow for the needs of child development that leads to the challenges in responding to calls for more academic stress or academic monitoring. There seems to be a competition with each other among the pre-school providers to attract 'customers' and to show that their school is the best and excellent in educating the children. Consequently, the function of pre-school has changed from educating social aspects, play and adapting the school environment to a formal learning approach (Rohaty, 1986). Ling Chu Poh (1983) stated in his study that the vast majority of pre-school in Malaysia implemented a very academic and formal curriculum.

Second, pre-school education has still not received proper attention from the government. Sufean (1993) claimed that the inconsistency and instability in the growth and progress of pre-schools in Malaysia results from the government's

laissez-faire policy towards early years education. The Report of the National Seminar of Pre-school Education (1984) that was prepared by EPRD MOE and UNICEF stated that there is no uniformity and balance in the development of pre-schools in Malaysia. There has been no real attempt by the government to establish a properly funded, co-ordinated service for young children which offers parents the child learning environment and facilities they need, while at the same time giving high priority to the development of secondary and higher learning institutions. A study conducted by Hewitt and Maloney (2000) also shows that the MOE has until recently had very little involvement in the provision or administration of pre-school education. The Ministry's role has traditionally been limited to the preparation of the curriculum and the registration of pre-school centres.

Owing to these factors, there is lack of provision for early childhood development and education. Consequently, this situation leads to the challenge of the lack of materials, environment and sources created for play. This might be because of the budgetary constraint or due to sophisticated new technologies and a policy that favours higher education over other forms of education. Results from Hamzah (1993) and Siti Zaliha (1999) studies provided evidence in support of this view.

Furthermore, evidence from other research shows that Malaysia lacks pre-school teacher training and continuing professional development. Ling Chu Poh (1988c) discussed further this issue in his paper presented in the sixth Malaysian National Convention of Education. The existing regulation for registration as a pre-school teacher possess minimum academic qualification, that is the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) or equivalent to O' level or GCSE in the UK. No professional training is

required prior to being a pre-school teacher and they do not need to have any experience working with young children.

There is training provided by the Social Welfare Department, MOE, Malaysian Pre-school Association and quasi-government or non-government institutions but it is operated usually on an in-service basis and the places are very limited. Some pre-school educators who are keen to work with children may follow modular in-service courses that are offered by private agencies but most training is self-funded and the fees are high. Sufean (1993) considers that the absence of highly qualified teachers in pre-schools poses another problem to the development of pre-school education in Malaysia.

The scenario reveals that the implementation of LTP also faces the challenge of the lack of teachers' understanding of the needs of child development and the importance of play to young children. The teachers perhaps, have limited knowledge of how play should be implemented in classroom practice, and their interpretation of 'learning through play' may vary from that held by pioneers and experts in child development and education.

Another challenge to implementing play in Malaysia may reflect parents' preference regarding the activities that should be undertaken by their children in pre-school. Research has indicated that many parents preferred more structured programme and do not appreciate play as approach to learning. According to Adnan (1993), most of the parents perceive the role of pre-school centres as the institution that will impart the mastery of reading, writing and arithmetic to their offspring. Rohaty (1984) in her

doctoral study highlighted that parental pressures have led to the introduction of teaching of academic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic in the kindergartens. More specifically, Ling Chu Poh (1988b, p. 185) lamented: “ *one of the challenges in pre-school education is to free the pre-school curriculum and teacher from unhealthy and unwarranted parental pressure and expectations*”

1.4 Aims and Research Questions

The main aim and objective of this study is to examine teachers’ and parents’ perspectives on play and their understanding of the role of play in children’s learning process. It is assumed that two main themes arise from this study, namely the teachers’ and parents’ understanding of the concept of play in relation to children’s learning, and their understanding of play in relation to teaching learning climates in pre-school context. Therefore, the research questions of this study can be stated as:

- 1) How do teachers and parents in Malaysian pre-schools understand play and the significance of play in child development and education?
- 2) To what extent do teachers and parents understand the concept of play in relation to children’s learning?
- 3) How is the learning through play approach implemented in classroom practice?
- 4) Is there any significant relationship between the philosophy and type of pre-schools and the allocation of play in classroom practice?
- 5) What are the problems or barriers faced by teachers in deploying play in pre-school?

1.5 Significance of the Study

With reference to the problems discussed there is a necessity to examine and analyse some of the challenges in incorporating play into classroom practice. Generally, this study contributes to research understandings in child development and education in both Malaysia and the UK, locally and internationally. Along with the above main objectives is the hoped that findings and outcomes of this study should be useful specifically in the following ways:

- a) The results of this study can be used as a basis for improving understanding of the teaching and learning through play approach in pre-school practice.
- b) The findings should add a new element to the body of knowledge of approaches in teaching young children and produce a better framework for teaching and assessing pre-school learning. So, this study may be useful in assisting education officers in planning and implementing training programs and courses for pre-school teachers that are appropriate to children's needs and development.
- c) The outcomes of the study could provide insights for pre-school providers and administrators on the necessity of incorporating play in pre-schools while at the same time providing awareness to parents and public of the importance of play in children's learning.
- d) This study also contributes as one of the research treasures that endeavour to improve the education of pre-school children in this country free from stress and academic pressure

- e) By inserting an Islamic point of view into the literature review, this study might contribute as one kind of interdisciplinary knowledge task in integrating a meeting point between a western worldview and Islamic fundamental beliefs within an era of increasing globalisation.

1.6 Organisation and Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of nine chapters. Chapter 1 explains the background information and statement of the problems leading to the objectives of the research. Chapter 2 reviews related literature in two aspects. First, an overview of major sources of reference on the theoretical framework concerns play in child development and education. Second, review of significant and relevant research on play in classroom practice conducted in the UK as well as in Malaysia. Chapter 3 begins with the research design and choice of method for data gathering, primarily interview. This chapter also describes the steps in implementation of the research and justification of the subjects; forming samples, developing the research instrument and the pilot study. Chapters 4 to 6 provide findings and analysis of the interview data for teachers, parents and administrators respectively. Subsequently, the results from the observational method of data collection are presented in chapter 7. This thesis ends with chapter 8 which presents the discussion of the results, implications of the study, recommendations for further research, the limitations of the study and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2:

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two main sections. First, the theoretical framework and main issues on which the study is based are reviewed. Second, a review of previous research conducted in the UK and Malaysia relevant to the subject matter and theme of this study are reviewed.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The topic of play and learning and the contribution of play in child development have prompted ideas, theories and studies by great educators throughout history. According to Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne (1984), play has increasingly being recognised as a serious scholarly subject throughout this century. Thus, there have been numerous theories concerning the nature of play. The theories such as Bruner (1915-), Friederick Froebel (1782-1852), Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) and Jean Piaget (1896-1980), emphasise different aspects of play and it is this that distinguishes one theory from another (Sheridan, 1977).

For example, Piaget viewed play as exploration. His description of play placed it firmly within his stage-based theory of cognitive development (Dockett and Fleer, 1999). Maria Montessori concentrated on learning through structured rather than

spontaneous play. She developed a theory of learning based on the idea that children are active learners. She believed that children are capable of creativity if they work through a series of structured activities (Moyle, 1989)

Meanwhile, Vygotsky viewed play as an outcome of social support. Therefore, his work places great emphasis on the importance of the adult's role in enhancing the child's ideas and thinking (Sheridan, 1977). Although somewhat idealistic, in the west, Froebel (1826) was among the first to suggest the significance of educative play in young children (Beardsley et al, 1998). He is the first who fully developed the theory that children learn through play (Tizard, 1977). Froebel believed that children's learning is most effective when they are engaged in imaginative and pretend play, which involves them in deep thought.

If we refer to the early classical theory of play, Bruce (1991) argued that recreation theory and surplus energy theory led to the thinking of work and play as separate activities. Besides, recapitulation theory, practice theory and other contemporary theories such as psychoanalytic theories and cognitive theories make play a central part of education.

2.1.1 Definition, Concept and Characteristics of Play in Childhood

The concept of play in childhood and the importance of play are recognised and supported by researchers from a range of disciplines including psychology, education, philosophy, sociology, recreation and health. There are many definitions of play and according to Wood and Attfield (1996) it is difficult to define play in

terms of its characteristics, purposes and value to children. Indeed definition of play is something that has caused a great deal of debate, derived from the different perspectives on the concept of play in children's education. This is also a result of different approaches to the study of play and different explanations of the way in which play adds to human experiences (Dockett and Fler, 1999). Therefore, many practitioners and researchers in this area have proposed that the meaning of children's play should be located in a context where it can be valued and understood.

The significance of play as perceived by pioneers such as Froebel, Isaac, Montessori and McMillan was related to the concept of freedom, innocence, naturalness and nurturing a child. Weininger (1980) described that play itself is a learning process through which infants learn about themselves and what they can do. He also believed that the growth and development of infants are dependent upon play. Moyles (1991,p.14) illustrated play as something that *"provides a potential starting point for all learning in a context in which children are at their most receptive"* and she then highlighted 14 main features of play identification. A principle, *"No one can make a child play. A child has to want to play"* is one of the twelve features of play suggested by Bruce and Meggitt (1999) which are often used as performance indicators for quality play.

From various sources it appears that the concept of play in childhood varies enormously. Sayeed and Guerin (2000) consider that play can be defined in terms of its overt and assumed characteristics. In terms of process, play according to them involves intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, learning, happiness, development, interaction and context; while play in terms of product offers thinking, motor

activity, behaviour and preparation for the future. Rubin et al. (1983) hypothesised that six criteria were important in making 'play' judgments: intrinsic motivation, attention to means rather than ends, distinguished from exploratory behaviour, nonliterality or pretense, free from externally applied rules and active participants.

In relation to child development, play also makes a vital contribution. A growing research body has established the importance of play in children's development (Kagan, 1990). Sheridan (1977), Yardley (1984) state that play is as important for a child's developmental needs as good nutrition, warmth, love and protection. According to Athey (1984), early childhood educators were among the first to recognise the value of play to the young child's physical, intellectual, language, social and emotional development.

In describing the word play there might also raised an issue of distinction between play per se and play as pedagogy. When we say play per se based on a dictionary definition, then, play is something enjoyable, pleasurable and amusing oneself in an activity or a game. Because it is an enjoyable activity and a natural tendency for young children, it should be considered as a natural way in which young children learn and therefore should be seen to contribute as a process for learning. Thus, many researchers and experts in early years education define play per se itself as something related to learning.

However, with reference to play as a 'pedagogical tool' it is necessary to distinguish this kind of play from play as a natural activity for children. Biber (1951) considered play in school to be a learning experience or in other words a pedagogical tool if

there is a teacher's sensitive understanding of her own role in creating the classroom ethos atmosphere and by guiding the children's play. Without skilful guidance, a free play program for successive years can become stultified and disturbing to children [cited in Weininger (1980) pp.47-48]. In other words, Biber points out that teachers have to know how much, when, and how to get involved in the children's play.

Meanwhile, Gelbach (1976) considered play educational if the activity incorporated instructional functions normally performed by the teacher. However, to maintain its status as play activity it is necessary for the activities to remain player-centred and stylised by the children and not the teacher [cited in Johnson & Ershler, 1982, p.139]. Darling (1983) considers that play that contributes to educational development is dependent upon the strategy and tactics of the teacher. Nonetheless, having to complete adult-led tasks such as work then play or play then work is seen as 'undervalued and undermines play' by Bruce and Maggitt (1999). Thus, early childhood educators need to have a clear view on what they believe and why and what this means for the early childhood context they create.

2.1.2 Play in Relation to Children's Learning

Play is widely regarded as providing a rich context for children's learning and a commitment to play has underpinned many traditional approaches to early childhood curriculum. Froebel described a strong connection between play and learning while McMillan and Isaac believed in the use of play as a means of enhancing learning. Cass (1971) argued that it is play that motivated forces in children's intellectual learning and the more intelligent a child the more he or she will learn from his play.

In describing play as a powerful learning medium, Whitebread (1996) stated that observation of children at play in Bruner's study (1972) give some indications that during play children are in control of their own learning. Wood and Bennett (1997) suggest that in educational contexts, play reveals children's needs and interests which then shape the curriculum offered.

Meanwhile, the Early Childhood Education Forum (ECEf: 1998:11) set out five foundations for early learning that occur in children's play. They are: belonging and connecting, being and becoming, contributing and participating, being active and expressing; and thinking imagining and understanding. Moyles (1989) who viewed that play is 'when children do their real learning' listed 8 main principles for the role and status of play in early childhood education. Early Years Curriculum Group (EYCG, 1992) also acknowledged that play is a natural way in which children learn. In one of the twelve principles that are fundamental for good early years practices they stated that playing and talking are the main way through which young children learn about themselves and the world around them.

According to The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology Report (POST, 2000) developmental psychology research has demonstrated that children's main sensory and cognitive learning achievements come from their own experiences in the course of activities such as play, exploration, everyday talk and social interaction with peers and siblings. Based on the principle that children learn through 'first-hand experiences' (Anning, 1991) and 'learning by doing, playing and talking' (Miller, 1997), many experts and practitioners believe and value that children are able to learn through play.

However, some modern educators regard play as the rewards that comes after the work and it is all right to play once the children's work has been finished. Grafton et. al. (1983) argued that some theories of play have led educators to think of work and play as very separate activities with 'work time' having a higher status than 'play time'. This separation of work and play, according to Dockett and Fleer (1999) has some links to the view that play is recreational rather than educational. Wood and Attfield (1996) view that the diversity between work and play has evolved because of different definitions of play and conflicting perspectives about its relationship with learning.

In analysing the differences between play and work, Macintyre (2001) concluded that play is characterised by being enjoyable, freely chosen by the player, can be abandoned without blame, has no preconceived outcome, gives pleasure and often counteracts stress; and develop skills which are important in non-play or work. Teachers in the study by Bennett et al (1997) considered play as fun and having a special role in learning while work was seen as teacher-directed activities that are serious and distressing.

2.1.3 Children's Play in Islamic Perspective

Islam is the formal religion in Malaysia and supposed to be practised as the way of life by Muslim. It is necessary then to have a closer look into the value and significance of play in child development and education according to the Islamic point of view. Hence, the Malaysian Minister of Education has stated in his response to the interview involved in this study that in developing early childhood programme,

MOE is cognizant of religious belief by incorporating Islamic intellectual thought in the program as well as western educational and psychological thoughts.

According to A'bdul Jabbar and An-Nababtah (1988) in Islamic perspectives, theories of play are based on the work contributed by some early Muslim educators, psychologists and philosophers such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (980-1038), Al-Ghazali (1058-1111), Ibn Sahnun (817-870), Ibn Qayyim Al Jauziah (1292-1350), Ar-Raghib Al-Asfahani (.... -1108), Ibn Maskawih (...- 1030), Az-Zarnuji and some Sufism men.

Play in Al-Ghazali's deliberation contributes to socio-emotional, physical and cognitive development of the children. As stated by A'bdul Jabbar and An-Nababtah (1988) Al-Ghazali viewed play as a medium of getting across children's natural tendency and the study of children's play should be an important consideration. He also proposed play as an element of leisure-time education.

In his book '*Ihya' U 'lumuddin*' that contains 16 series, Al-Ghazali argued that play is not simply spontaneous activities for young children but it has three specific main roles in child learning development. First, play facilitates physical development and strengthens all parts of the human body. Second, play cultivates the sense of enjoyment, delight and happiness in a child's socio-emotional development. Third, play releases children from learning stress, the thing that makes children feel that education is joyful and pleasure (Al-Barjis, 1980)

Meanwhile, Ibn Sina (980-1036) in his book '*Canon of Medicine*' stated that the child up to the age of six is to be disciplined and taught gradually in a manner that does not turn him off learning such as intermittent play, amusement and rest. The child also should not be forced to learn any subjects, but only those which suit his talent and disposition. Ibn Sina also recommended group learning and group playing among mates of approximately but not identical ages (A'li and An- Naqib, 1984). According to Kojak and Mursi (1992) Ibn Sina's values of play are closely related to physical activity hence they attribute a great role in child physical development. Vigorous play activity is the hallmark of the healthy child in his development. Beside that, Ibn Sina advocated that music and rhyme could moderate children's sensation and uplift their feeling and emotion.

Another muslim educator considered as promoting play in children's learning was Rifa'ah At-Tahtawi in his book "*Trustee Guidance for boys and girls*" (Abu Hilal et al, 1993). According to them, At-Tahtawi emphasised the importance of teachers' kindness and being gentle to children in educating them, and warned teachers of the negative implications of harsh and abrasive teaching approach to children's mental state especially if they try to separate children from play activities. At- Tahtawi said:

"...Teachers should give opportunity to the children to have time experiencing good play with challenging activity. This kind of 'exercise' reviving soul, avoiding laziness, dismissal stupidity and stimulate agility" (translated from Abu Hilal et al, 1993:19).

Al-A'udat (1992) listed and elaborated play as one of the eight rights of children in Islamic Law. According to him, play is the primary emphasis in a child's life especially during early childhood since this is the means through which they gain an understanding of the world around them. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

gave importance to children's play through his deeds and words. In one of his famous quotations he advises parents: "*Those who have a child should act like a child with him*" (cited in Beshir and Beshir, 2001:27). In another respect concerning children's play, the Prophet said: "*Ground and earth medium for children's (play)*" (translated from Al-Khatib, 1992: 67)

In the meantime, Jabbaar (1997) in her study of "*Children in Islamic Law*" recognised that play contributes to the development of cognitive, creativity, physical, morals, and social development in each stage of child development. She suggested three main characteristics in defining good quality play for children's educational benefit. First, the level or type of play should be according to children's level of age or ability. Second, it should be from the type that encourages children to mimic or imitate the behaviour of adults and their way of thinking. Third, the materials made for any toys should have safety element and 'easy cleaning'.

2.1.4 Learning Through Play in Classroom Practice

Theories and definitions of play need a pedagogy that helps translate theory to practice for young children. As stated by Moyles (1989), there should be a link to relate theory to practice in an ongoing, continuous and straightforward way. In various literature concerning planning for play as central method of education, usually three main points are mentioned; the teachers' roles, parents in partnership and, the content and context of play which includes organisation of activity, materials, time and space.

With reference to the Rumbold Report (DES: 1990): 11), for the potential value of play to be realised a number of conditions need to be fulfilled:

- (a) Sensitive, knowledgeable and informed adult involvement and intervention
- (b) Careful planning and organisation of play settings in order to provide for and extend learning
- (c) Enough time for children to develop their play
- (d) Careful observation of children's activities to facilitate assessment and planning for progression and continuity.

According to Mastura and Lindsay (2002) the increasing emphasis on the role of adult in determining the quality of play is always being debated among professionals in this field. OFSTED (1993) asserts that evidence for the quality of the process of teaching and learning through play is to be found directly in the work teachers do with their children.

In discussing the matter of how adults could enhance children's play, these questions might be raised; what provisions are teachers making? In what ways are teachers intervening in children's play? How are teachers using children's play as an indicator of their educational development? (Fromberg, 1990). Manning and Sharp (1977) argued that only observation and knowledge of the children tell the teacher when to intervene or not to intervene. The PPA guidelines (1990, p.8) explained the roles of adults in children's play as "*they have to be constantly aware of the direction of each individual child's play, ready when appropriate to add, to comment, to guide, to question, to explore, to extend*". Mastura and Lindsay (2002), divided the involvement of teachers in children's play into 9 categories: guided-play or tutoring,

sit beside, observe the play, play alongside the children, invite the assistance of parent helpers or nursery nurses, initiate a discussion, intervene, teaching story-telling or book reading, and whole class interactive.

Meanwhile, in elaborating the role of teacher as playmate, Lally (1991) provided some insight into practical approaches to teach through play. According to her, teachers should join in play activities with the intention of broadening the children's knowledge through play rather than by direct instruction and it is also important that teachers encourage children to develop a broad view of society through the play. The teachers in the study by Bennett et al (1997) translated their theories into practice through planning, organisation, the environment and their intention for learning.

Pertaining to the matter of parental involvement or parents as partners, as the roots of play and learning begin in the earliest relationships, so they can foster playfulness by encouraging play of very young children. This process prepares the children to be able to use the teacher in a similar way. According to Curry and Arnaud (1984), parents could initiate children's play ideas by responding to the child's early efforts at pretend, by pointing out play possibilities among available toys, and by letting the child know they approve of the child's play ideas. Pascal and Bertram (1997) put parental partnership and liaison as one of ten dimensions of play quality. In discussing further this issue, they proposed some questions as the way of evaluating and improving parental partnership in play; how are parents involved in the play? In what ways do parents and other adults in the community, contribute to the play activities? Does the play reflect the children's home and community environment?

In other respects of translating theory into practice, Matusiak (1992) suggested that in order to play the child must have the materials, the curiosity and confidence to explore. In analysing curricular effects on play, Johnson & Ershler (1982) view that to contribute to the development or education of the child, play opportunities need to be appropriate and challenging such as 'divergent or convergent problem solving'. Isaacs (1930) differentiates between 3 types of play that could provide challenging activities; play related to the development of bodily skills, play which leads to the exploration of physical environment and understanding of the world; and play as imaginative pursuit [cited in Yardley (1984): 266]. Play also could be deployed through and with language; development of creativity skills (Moyle, 1989) and problem solving that involves natural curiosity and encouraging mind (Curtis, 1986).

In relation to play context, there should be well-planned provision for different kinds of play (EYCG, 1992). Based on the Head Start Project, Kagan (1990) views that the facilitation of play through the environment is one of the appropriate practices in implementing play in the classroom. Almy et al (1984) also believed that teachers could influence the play by providing a physical and social environment that is conducive to play and by responding to and participating in the play.

2.2 Previous Research on Play

2.2.1 Learning Through Play in the UK Context

There are a large numbers of researches which contribute to the study of teachers' and parents' perception of the role of play in children' learning and how play is being organised in pre-school classrooms in Western country. However, this study focuses

only on some prominent studies conducted in the UK context which are considered as similarly related to its approach and theme.

The rationale for the selection of studies to be reviewed is that they have examined the views of teachers towards the value of play. Even though some of them have examined the impact of the National Curriculum on a play-based curriculum for young children, their primary focus was on the teachers' value of play.

The first study, Smith (1994) in her Masters dissertation "Play as a Strategy for Teaching the National Curriculum" used questionnaires to look at the opinions of teachers regarding play as a teaching strategy and the effects of the implementation of the National Curriculum on play and also carried out school-based work to examine whether play is an effective teaching strategy. Results of this study indicate that play is not utilised to its potential by many teachers because the limitations of space and time reduce the play activities available to them and assessment and recording of learning achieved through play is generally not very sophisticated. The implementation of the National Curriculum has reduced the play activities because the quantity of information and skills to be taught has put further pressures of time onto teachers. The results of the study have implications for the education of teachers in terms of their roles in children's play, and teachers' encouragement to reconsider their classroom organization and management in order to create the space and time to teach through play. The weakness of the teachers in these areas should be acknowledged by ensuring that they should get a proper training to be a knowledgeable pre-school educator and know how to deal children with various situations.

Meanwhile, Bennett et al (1997) developed strategies for enhancing and exploring understandings of what actually happens in classrooms through their study: “Teaching Through Play: Teachers’ Thinking and Classroom Practice”. The study which was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council had three main aims; to provide a clear specification of teachers’ theories of play, to ascertain relationship between teachers’ theories and their classroom practice, and to examine the perceived impact of mediating factors or constraints on this relationship. A three stage model was used for data collections: narrative accounts, semi-structured interviews and stimulated reflection on videotaped episodes of play.

The findings indicate that each teacher holds a personal set of theories about play that show clear links between play and learning. However, there were mediating factors in teaching context which intervened between the teachers’ theories and their practice including the pressures of the National Curriculum, space, resources, the daily timetable, adult: child ratio and expectations of colleagues, parents and OFSTED. Thus, the researchers concluded that there is a need to improve the quality of teaching and learning through play by creating some conducive conditions for teaching through play that could makes a valuable state to this process..

Another study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council was carried out by Elizabeth Wood (1999) entitled: “The Impact of the National Curriculum on Play in Reception Classes”. The aims of the study were to elicit the teachers’ theories of play, to ascertain the relationship between theories and practice and to examine the perceived impact of mediating factors on this relationship. The study indicates that the National Curriculum was perceived as having a constraining influence. However,

the teachers' theories about the value of play as a medium for learning development pre-dominated over their views of the impact of the National Curriculum. This research has provided evidence that although the National Curriculum has been perceived as a threat to early years principles and practice, these teachers drew on considerable professional and pedagogical knowledge to provide what they considered to be an appropriate curriculum for reception class children. Thus, it can be concluded from this study that a commitment to and belief in play as a learning medium remains a key issue for early years teachers.

A recent study on the issue of play in classroom practice has been contributed by Keating et al (2000) entitled: "Perceptions of Play in the Reception Class". This study examine the attitudes to and perceptions of play in the reception class of its five major stakeholders; head teachers, teachers, the classroom assistant, the parents and the child. The data was collected via semi-structured informal interviewed and individual interviews in one to one situations. The results from this study indicated two main issues to be discussed: 1) the pressure on teachers to provide evidence of learning attainment has placed them in a dilemma whether to choose to encourage quality learning through active play or to opt for formal work which sacrifices the quality of learning. 2) As a result of curriculum pressure, play was often regarded across the sample as a reward for the completion of work and less important than work. Play also functioned in practice, as a holding task while the teacher was busy teaching. In particular, this study brings evidence that there is a clear distinction between the rhetoric and reality of play in classroom practice.

The conclusions that can be drawn from these studies are as follows. First, play is not utilised to its potential by many teachers as a pedagogical tool in teaching young children but, rather, it is often used as a time-filler. As indicated in the Bennett and Kell study (1989), play was observed to be ‘limited and limiting’. It was often used as a time-filler, and lacked both purpose and challenge [cited in Wood and Bennett (1997), pp.22]. OFSTED (1993) also reported that the quality of learning through play (LTP) presented ‘rather a dismal picture’ (*Childfacts*, 1996) with fewer than half of the teachers exploiting its educational potential. Often, teachers appear to consider that the presence of the National Curriculum required them to adopt other, more formal methods. Because there is so much to cover, then there isn’t time to play. Second, there is a need to improve the quality of teaching through play, because many teachers seem to have little understanding of how to integrate play into planning for learning. Third, a commitment and belief in play as a learning medium is a necessity for play to be practised in a meaningful context of ‘learning through play’.

The studies presented here as reviews of LTP in the UK context indicate that there are a number of tensions between ideology and practice. Even though there is a substantial literature which emphasises research findings that children learn by playing, these studies shows that there is a major gap between the rhetoric and the reality of play being at the heart of the early years curriculum. As stated by Bruce (1999), in England the vast majority of children at 4 years of age are put into a school environment where often there is a little or no opportunity for the elaboration and increasing complexity of play to develop. In line with this view, Loughrey (2000) also indicated that evidence from research suggests that whilst the focus is on

play as the context for learning in pre-school establishments, it quickly turns to a focus on work on entry to the reception class.

2.2.2 Research on Play in the Malaysian Pre-schools Practice

In dealing with the Malaysian context, the researcher found very few publications or research available on play in early childhood classroom. Even though research on early child development in Malaysia has been focused primarily on various aspects of pre-school education (Rohaty et. al, 1996), research on play in pre-school practice has not been a primary concern. The studies on early child development in Malaysia have been focused primarily on government policy, aspects in child development, parental involvement in early childhood settings, and issues concerning teachers' training. There is a study focused on a review of a Malaysian pre-school curriculum conducted by Rohaty et al (1996), and an investigation of the implementation of an integrated curriculum conducted by the Curriculum Development Centre within the MOE in 1999. However, nothing has been done on the implementation of play during teaching-learning sessions. Throughout the readings, the researcher found only four studies related to the theme of this study. However, these studies generally focused on play in terms of its provision in pre-school and not on perceptions or attitudes towards play activities itself.

The first similar study in Malaysia that related to the play theme was conducted by Hamzah Dadu (1993) in his Masters dissertation entitled: *“Play Patterns and The Management of Play Activities in Pre-school in Miri, Sarawak”*. This study investigated types of play patterns in Malaysian pre-schools and examined play from

a management aspect. The results of the study indicated three main points: 1) most of pre-school centre in Malaysia were inadequately equipped with outdoor and indoor play facilities. 2) The patterns of play activities were found to be homogenous for all types of pre-schools centre. 3) Play activities were found to be satisfactorily managed in all centres. However, the teachers gave less attention to the implementation of the activities.

In the second study, Linda Miller (1999) was invited to teach a course on play in language and literacy to pre-school educators in Kota Kinabalu, in the region of Sabah, East Malaysia in November 1998. Through this visit, she describes four aspects: pre-school provision in Malaysia, the introduction of National Curriculum Guideline Book packages for Kindergarten, training for pre-school educators and her experiences of training some Malaysian pre-school educators. Through her observation, she concludes that the current emphasise in Malaysia is an attempt to move pre-school educators towards an approach which involves LTP, even if this approach is not yet fully realised in practice.

However, the indication from this small observation cannot be generalised because the researcher was visiting only Malaysian private pre-schools and local government policy between East and West Malaysia is different in the aspect of responsibility distribution. If the researcher had visited government-funded or state funded pre-schools in West Malaysia, the indication of the study might vary. Thus, there is a need to investigate what is really happen in Malaysian pre-school classrooms in terms of teaching and learning climates.

The third study was conducted by Siti Zaleha Reduan (1999) on “*Teachers’ perception of Play in pre-schools in Sarawak*” for the degree of doctor of Education in University of Bristol, England. This study set out to describe and analyse the perceptions of pre-school teachers of play by looking at their definition of play, the provisions of play in pre-schools, how pre-schools promote play and the constraints faced by them. The results indicated that there is a misfit between teachers’ perceptions of play and what they are doing. There is also inadequate level of facilities and equipment for both indoor and outdoor activities in all the pre-schools. Similar to the Miller (1999), this study was also conducted in East Malaysia and the indication of the study might vary if the same study carried out in West Malaysia. In addition, this study only examined teachers’ perceptions of play through questionnaires and no tasks had been made to examine parents’ perceptions.

The fourth study was conducted by Hewitt and Maloney (2000) on “*Malaysian Parents’ Ideal and Actual Perceptions of Pre-school Education*”. This study examined the perceptions of Malaysian parents concerning pre-school education. One of the main interview questions concerned parents’ perceptions towards play in pre-school practice. Results indicated that in terms of the ideal world, play-based curriculum is viewed unfavourably by most Malaysian parents and that pressure is placed on teachers to provide children with formal academic programs. However, these parents have been socialised in a high-pressure environment which values academic achievement and examination results above all. In other words, their ‘actualised perceptions’ of what they feel is important to the child if they are to meet the demands of the society. Nevertheless, the main purpose of this study was not examining learning through play practices in the settings and the results on play

perceptions which cannot be generalised because the 21 parents involved in this study were selected from only 4 private pre-schools in the capital city of Malaysia.

From the research listed above, it can be argued that there is no research in West Malaysia that examines both parents' and teachers' perceptions on play and the impact of their understanding on the implementation of play in classroom practice. Also, no research in Malaysia has investigated the relationship between the LTP approach and different types of pre-schools.

2.3 Rationale and Significance for the Present Study

2.3.1 Brief Review of the UK Policy and Practice: the lessons from abroad

The topic of policy and practice in early childhood education involves a range of issues, including co-ordination of services, quality control, responsibility distribution, curriculum and approaches in teaching young children, teachers' training and continuing professional development, staff: child ratio and parental involvement.

In comparing the UK and the Malaysian policy and practice related to the present study, two main features of good practices will be examined: the learning through play approach in teaching young children, and parental involvement or partnership with parents. The findings of a Masters degree study conducted by Rohana Madon (1992) indicated that nursery education in the UK is seen to be more developed and has better facilities than in Malaysia. According to Rohana, the major problems of nursery schools and classes in Malaysia are in terms of inadequacy of equipment and

materials, unsuitability of buildings and classrooms, inadequacy of qualified teachers and lack of parents' participation. It is to be hoped that in evaluating policy and practice in early childhood education in Malaysia, policy makers and practitioners could learn from the systems of pre-school education in the UK where, by year 2000, it was apparent that the literature and evidence from researchers had been influential in moving the UK government policy towards an early childhood perspective for the future. Great effort has been made by professionals and experts in the field in the UK to gain an appropriate position for early years provision. After many years of struggles and exertions, early years practitioners have found their voices at last (Miller, 2000).

1) Learning through play approach in teaching young children

Theoretically, nursery and infant schools in the UK base much of their education on play. Research by practitioners for example Sylva and Anning (1989), Nutbrown and David (1992), Miller (1997), suggest that all pre-school provision in the UK is characterised by a curriculum that is largely play-based, no matter which sector offers it.

With reference to their curriculum documents, a study conducted by Mastura and Lindsay (2000) indicated that the learning through play approach is valued, accepted and stressed in the vast majority of the written documents. The Rumbold Report (QCA, 1990) admitted that play underlies a great deal of young children's learning and recognises it as an approach to learning. Having adopted a quotation on the role of play from QCA (1990), this report really emphasised the appropriateness of the

LTP approach in relation with quality. Referring to the Start Right Report (Ball, 1994), Sylva (1994) in her article “ A Curriculum for Early Learning”, supported what was written in the Rumbold Report that play should be an approach to learning and she states that in implementing the curriculum, play is the agreed approach.

Unfortunately, nothing of the nature of young children’s learning was included in the Desirable Learning Outcomes (SCAA, 1996) and play received simply a few passing mentions (David, 1998). However, this kind of document which led to a curriculum that was too formal and caused a move away from an emphasis on play, was criticised by many practitioners in early years education who were concerned that the focus of early years curriculum should focus on the children and their development, not on subjects and acquisition of knowledge (Mastura and Lindsay, 2000). Thus, pertaining to limitations of this document, the government white paper “Excellence in Schools” (June 1997) set out the intention that the desirable learning outcomes should be reviewed and, following after that, came series of national conferences that discussed the proposals which later formed the basis for the formal consultation that outlined the idea of a foundation stage and early learning goals (Trudell et al, 1999).

The Early Learning Goals document (QCA, 1999) stresses the role of play in the teaching of young children. The key concept in this document is learning through a well-planned play approach and the value of play in children learning is explained clearly. Even though evidence from research revealed that there are a number of tensions between theory and practice - as elaborated earlier in this chapter- a study conducted by Mastura and Lindsay (2002) indicated that play in pre-school settings in Britain can be described as ‘this is how children live and learn’. In other words,

children were given opportunity to learn through play and the settings facilitated a play environment for children's learning development, or at least in fulfilling the basic and natural needs of children to play. The need for improvement is in the aspect of teachers' involvement and intervening in children's play and organising for play.

In addition, findings from a recent study conducted by Keating et al (2002) revealed that the value of play as a tool for learning seems to have provided teachers with the greatest challenge in linking their beliefs with the reality of the demands of the curriculum. However, many teachers acknowledged the importance of the organisation of the learning environment to facilitate child-initiated play. This study indicated that many concerns of reception teachers in relation to the provision of an appropriate and effective curriculum are still embedded within the topic of play.

Unfortunately, in the Malaysian context the pre-school curriculum is based on a subject-compartmentalised or a content-based approach. The place of play as an approach in teaching young children only receives a few passing mentions in the written curriculum documents. As elaborated earlier in chapter 1 (1.3, pp. 8-11), in terms of practice, the implementation of LTP in pre-school faces many challenges that impede the progress of this approach. Besides, evidence from research in Malaysian pre-school contexts revealed that the vast majority of pre-school in Malaysia implement a very academic and formal curriculum (Ling Chu Poh, 1983).

2) Parental Involvement in early years education

Parents in many countries want to become more involved in their children's schooling and understand the educational process more fully. Governments too are recognising that high standards of achievement depend, to a certain extent, on parental support. More and more are introducing policies, which encourage parents, families and the community in general to be involved in the education offered by their local schools.

Involvement may take different forms such as involvement in political activity at national level and may be sometimes on policy-making committees or representation on school governing bodies. Moreover, helping in the classroom, and teaching and supporting children's learning at home are also forms of involvement. Curtis (1998 pp. 137) indicated that there are a number of ways in which parents can become involved in their children's education. The most usual are the traditional approaches of fund raising; helping on outings and day trips; cleaning paint pots or tidying up at the end of the session (children should be doing most of this themselves); reading stories to children; helping in the classroom and working with small groups for such activities as cooking or clay modelling. The report of the OECD study of nine countries (1997) pointed out that parents and families in many OECD countries want to be able to support their children's learning more effectively at home, to work in partnership with teachers and to have more choice in selecting schools.

One of the clear advantages in the British education system is that there is a closer link between school and home especially in pre-schools. The 1988 Education Act

appears to have strengthened the positions of parents in terms of their influence at local level. Parental involvement in children's schooling is strongly encouraged in this country. For example, some books or pamphlets for parents are produced by bodies like the Advisory Centre for Education. There are also books for parents advising them how to exert influence, like *A Parent's Guide to Education* and *Education: an Action Guide for Parents*; or for parent and other governors, such as *A Handbook for School Governors*, or radio programmes, like *The Education Road show* on BBC Radio 4, which travelled the country with a panel of experts giving advice to parents who attended or phoned in (Wragg, 1989). According to Wolfendale (1983), practitioners in the UK are inching ahead slowly towards the evolution of policies and services for young children and their families that involves those very families in the decision-making process,

Parental involvement in Malaysia however is very different from that practised in England. Another important issue is the lack of link between pre-school educators and parents (education at home) especially for those who are in rural areas. Indeed, there are no guidelines and no such statement from the ministry regarding this matter. The involvement of parents in their children's schooling is limited to attending social gatherings such as prize-giving day, parent-teachers association (PTA) meeting, sports day, canteen day, school open day and any religious function. The educated parents are not encouraged to 'interfere' in the classroom teaching as volunteers or assistants. Parental involvement is restricted to learning activities at home. In our country, children are provided with their own set of textbooks and parents are responsible to buy exercise and activity books for their children even for pre-school children.

If we compare Malaysian preschool curriculum with The Early Learning Goals (QCA, 1999) in the aspect of common features of good practice, a statement about parents as partners or the relationship between preschool educators and parents was elaborated clearly in the British curriculum. Nonetheless, there is no such declaration and not even a small topic written in the Malaysian preschool curriculum guidelines pertaining to this matter. The findings of a sub-study conducted by Rohaty et al (1996) is that within the settings included in their study, there was a very narrow definition of parental involvement. There was also no exchange of information between teacher and parent that would either help the teacher provide appropriate support for the child in the programme, nor prepare the parent to understand their role in supporting the child's development. In other words, there was no linkage or continuity between the pre-school centre and the home.

Some educated parents are concerned about their children's schooling but their involvement is limited up to 'the school office door'. Consequently, parental concern about their child's education is focused more on academic achievement than on the needs of a child development potential.

The argument why the MOE should be enlightened on this issue is based on the following reasons stated by Morrison (1978, pp.150-152) in explaining the advantages of parental involvement:

1. Teachers can benefit from the help parents provide to the school and classroom through aiding, making materials, working with small groups, etc.

2. Children in any educational program can and do benefit from having social interaction with a wide variety of adults who bring to the educational setting diverse and rich cultural backgrounds, skills, and points of view.
3. There is a wide variety of parent talent
4. Self-image of parents can be enhanced through involvement in classroom management
5. The attitude of the parent toward education and the educational system can be changed or altered through participation in educational programs
6. Teachers by having an opportunity to interact with parents, can begin to have more empathy toward an appreciation for the role of parent.

One reason for the reluctance of teachers to encourage parents to become involved in the educative process may be that teachers do not view parents as educators, as is also the case with policy-makers!

As we look forward to the next decade and beyond, it is possible to speculate about what will be some of the developments in the area of parent involvement. As parents become increasingly involved, they will demand still more involvement and this might raise some problems either in the UK or in Malaysia. In an effort to demarcate the line of authority, the government could highlight some guidelines as to what extent the parents can become involved.

2.3.2 Linkage between Literature and the Focus of the Study

The relationship between play and learning and in particular whether play is an appropriate approach in teaching young children has been debated in the literature for many years. The literature has revealed that play contributes to various aspects of child development and the importance of play as a vehicle by which young children learn most effectively is valued and recognised by educational theorists, early educators from the western and Islamic world and experts in early years education.

In various literatures there was also suggestions and recommendations on how to help translate theory and belief to practice in an ongoing and continuous way. However, evidence from research shows that there is a significant gap between the rhetoric surrounding play and actual practice in early years classrooms. Many teachers through their training and reading know the value of play in children's development but they do not know how to guide that play to make it more educational.

According to Fisher (2002), while infant teachers quite commonly talk about the value of play, they frequently do not find a place for it in their classroom practice. For example, the research conducted by Bennett et al (1997) and Keating et al (2000) indicate that the idealised relationship between play and learning which teachers may hold is not always realised in practice. Meanwhile, there was also evidence found in the literature that many parents are at loss to see the educational function of play in school (Weininger, 1980).

In the Malaysian context, the current emphasis reflects an attempt to move pre-school education towards an approach which involves LTP (Miller, 1999). Based on the literature survey, there were very few publications on research available on play in Malaysian pre-school classroom. In addition, there was also evidence from research that parents in Malaysia did not value play as important medium in the educational development of their children (Maloney and Hewitt, 2000).

So, on the basis of a limited number of studies in this area in Malaysia and the debated issues on teachers' and parents' valuation of play, the specific focus of this study is to examine teachers' and parents' understanding of the concept of play in relation to children's development and education, more specifically, the value of play in Malaysian pre-school classroom practice. The term 'understanding' used in this study refers to the views, beliefs and perceptions that these two major groups of socialising agents of young children, teachers and parents, hold about the concept and relative importance of play in relation to children's learning development. Besides, the secondary focus of this study is to explore factors that contribute as impeding the progress of deploying play in Malaysian pre-school practice.

2.3.3 The Theoretical Underpinning and the Writer's Stance

The theories underpinning this study either from western or Islamic intellectual thought show an integrated meeting point between a western worldview and Islamic fundamental beliefs whereby play is viewed as an integral part of the child's being and contributes to various aspects of children's learning and development. The theorists' views, the ideas from the early educators as well as evidence contributed

by practitioners and researchers expert in this area provide a powerful argument for the use of play in promoting children's learning development. From the definitions and concepts of play constructed by them it could be indicated that play has a unique and vital role in the whole educational process for young children.

For me, because the task of a child is play and we cannot separate between the natural tendencies of play from the child's being, so, logically the most natural and efficient way for a child to acquire competency in any curricular area and develop their potential and skills should be through play-based activity. As children enjoy when they play, psychologically there is no feeling that they are imposed on by someone with more power which might make them feel pressured. Thus they are learning things unconsciously and informally, in a fun situation.

Here, I conclude that play may be considered as a pedagogical tool when it becomes the way or medium in which teachers organise and manage children's learning. In other words, play should be the medium for learning not as activity 'instead' of the classroom teaching and learning climates. Learning through play (LTP) should be interpreted in practice either by putting play as a foundation or medium for learning in classroom practice, as a pedagogical tool in teaching and learning the curriculum contents, as a central method of education, or as the vehicle by which young children learn most effectively.

One important point that I would like to highlight here is that, in teaching a child, it is often mistakenly believed that the final product or the outcome is more important than the process of learning. If this happened, the child is sacrificed for the adult's

image of what he or she is supposed to become. In education through play, by contrast, the process of learning should be highly valued in itself, simply because there is great joy in learning.

CHAPTER 3:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This study is concerned with collecting and analysing information in as many forms as possible. According to Bell (1999) researchers adopting a qualitative perspective are more concerned to understand individuals' perceptions of the world and seek insight rather than statistical analysis. Therefore, the qualitative method was chosen as a strategy, which tends to focus on exploring, in as much detail as possible. Sherman and Webb (1988) suggested that one of the characteristics of qualitative research is that the researchers attend to the experience as a whole, not as separate variables. Hence, the aim of qualitative research in this study is to understand experience as unified.

This study also focused on two categories of methodology: library research or 'deskwork technique' (Blaxter et al, 2001) and fieldwork. The method of documentation used was based on documents or data relevant to this study, comprising books, the Islamic Education sources written in Arabic language, journal articles, previous research under the same subject including that was taken from varieties of seminars and conferences, and the official reports of the organisations related to this study. Apart from these, other sources were also referred to, such as government publications and official statistics, newspapers, popular media and the Internet.

3.0.1 The Multi-method Approach

In the fieldwork study, the data in this study were gathered by using multiple methods or methodological triangulation '*where different strategies are used to investigate the results*' (Tilstone, 1998, p.33). Denzin (1978) insists that multiple methods approach is the generic form of triangulation. This study applied the first, third and fourth types of triangulation advocated by Denzin (1978) whereby he distinguished four types of triangulation: data, investigators, theories and methodologies. The data triangulation represented in this study refers to the use of different kind of data sources at different time, different spaces and from different persons involving interviews and observations. As the third type of triangulation, this study approached data with multiple perspectives and various theoretical points of view of western and Islamic thoughts. Finally, as a fourth type, between-method triangulation was used through combination between semi-structured interviews and structured observations.

According to Robson (1999), the main advantage of employing multiple methods is in the reduction of inappropriate certainty. Stake (1995) argued that in qualitative research, triangulation can be conceptualised as an alternative to validation, and fitted to the particular problems that arise while Flick (2002) views that triangulation increases scope, depth and consistency in methodological proceedings. Silverman (1993) pointed out that triangulation was developed to overcome a number of recognised difficulties in fieldwork. For example, by using multiple sources of data collection, it is argued that comparisons and contrasts between these can indicate the generalizability of accounts and theories [cited in Schostak, 2002: 79].

3.0.2 Interviewing Children

Children are the most significant stakeholders in pre-school provision. However, their voices are rarely heard even though their views and rights are supposed to be considered seriously. For example, the Children Act 1989 demands that children's views be heard and taken into account (David, 1996). According to Brooker (2001) a growing body of early childhood researchers has argued that it is important and appropriate to listen to the voices of the children on issues that concern them.

Interviewing children is one of the ways we can access children's needs and views. However, there are some difficulties involved in interviewing young children. This is because the status of the child will vary with respect to age, general cognitive ability, emotional status and specific knowledge at the time of the research (Lindsay, 2000). Therefore, we have to pay closer attention to method and technique in gaining children's perspectives because there is recognition that much of children's social experience is highly structured by the adult world (James et al, 1998). Based on this point of view, Greig and Taylor (1999) advocate that interviewing children for research is a skill which needs to be developed and cultivated. A relatively free-flow interaction is a method that enables the researcher to pick up on important and emotive issues by gentle probing and to discover information from the topics the children raise themselves. This is often preferable to asking specific questions, especially with young children (Greig and Taylor, 1999).

In interviewing children, issues are raised related to children's competence which may make them appear inadequate and unreliable research respondents.

Nevertheless, researchers agree that the limitations to young children's competence as respondents are generally the limitations of those who interview them (Brooker, 2001). According to Lewis and Lindsay (2000), the interviewer is a key component in the production of the child's perspectives. Concerning validity and reliability, there are some techniques for eliciting children's views that must be considered during preparation for and opening of the interview, during the interviewing process and when closing the interview and giving feedback. These techniques involve the use of prompts and props to engage children's interest, avoiding direct questioning which could threaten the children (Brooker, 2001), avoiding actions that could lead to the loss of the child's view (Lewis and Lindsay, 2000) and the use of non-verbal communication such as drawings and stories (James et al, 1998). There are also some ethical considerations that need to be given priority in interviewing the children which will be discussed further in the next section.

3.0.3 The Role of Researcher

The position or the role of researcher in the field of study has long been a concern in qualitative research. This is because the principal data of qualitative research are gathered directly by the researcher him or herself. Therefore, a researcher is usually expected to be knowledgeable about the research, the approaches or strategies being used as well as ethical and personal issues, especially because the researcher is considered as a 'Data-Gathering Instrument' (Hatch, 1990). In this study, the data includes transcriptions of interviews with informants and anecdotal recording from the structured observation.

Marshall and Rossman (1995) argued that the issue of researcher as the 'instrument' could be divided into technical and interpersonal elements. The technical consideration addresses issues such as negotiating entry and efficiency. Interpersonal skills of the researcher include factors such as building trust, reciprocity, role maintenance and receptivity. In elaborating the roles and responsibilities of researcher, Aubrey et al (2000) consider three main areas. First, the people involved, which refers to participants and others such as gatekeepers, funding bodies, supervisors, family and friends. The second main area is the research process. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995) the researcher's presence in the lives of participants invited to be part of the study is fundamental to the paradigm. As with in-depth interviews involved in this study, the researcher enters into the lives of the participants and, depending on the nature of the research, this may be a substantial 'intrusion'.

Aubrey et al (2000) view that the most significant aspect concerning responsibility and roles in the research process is the integrity of the researcher whereby the ethical considerations (see 3.0.4) are having the greatest importance. Then, the third area refers to roles and responsibilities in interpreting the research findings. For example, if the findings do not support the researcher's beliefs and wishes for the outcomes, this could have an emotional effect, but the responsibility on a researcher is to present unbiased evidence. This requires the researcher to address and cope with such disappointment but to remain true is the scientific ideal.

3.0.4 Ethical Issues Involved in Conducting the Research

Ethical codes, ethical guidelines, codes of conduct or research guidelines provide guidance to influence the research process. Aubrey et al (2000) define research ethics as ‘the making of moral judgements about the aims and methods of the study’. The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 1992) listed some ethical guidelines for conducting educational research. These ethical guidelines included responsibility to the research profession, responsibility to the participants, responsibility to the public, relationship with funding agencies, publication, intellectual ownership and relationship with host institution. Meanwhile, in discussing contents of ethical codes and guidelines, Lindsay (2000) argued that there should be one ethical code for researchers with children.

According to Burgess (1989), questions of access, power, harm, deception, secrecy and confidentiality are all issues that the researcher has to consider and resolve often in the research context. As this study used in-depth face to face interviews as the main method of collecting the data, the main ethical issue was responsibility to the participants or the interview respondents. Some ethical issue that should be considered in dealing with responsibility to the participants are ‘research relations, informed consent and data dissemination’ (Burgess, 1989).

In the present study, participants included parents, teachers, administrators, policy maker, and children. There are different power relationships between the researcher and these participants. In the case of the policy maker, the power is heavily in favour of the participant, whereas in the case of the children, the researcher has more power.

Consequently power relationships in this study were varied across participants, requiring special attention to take them into account for each type of participant.

Respect of individuals was assured by, for example, ensuring each adult was asked to agree to contribute and, as in one case where a parent declined no pressure was put on and the parent was not included in the study. Children were safeguarded firstly by ensuring informed consent by parents and teachers, and also by ensuring that all interviews were carried out in familiar settings in which the children felt safe and at ease. Confidentiality was assured for all participants except the Minister of Education where identity could not be masked, and this was made clear when the interview was arranged.

Seidman (1998) summarised 7 main points that should be covered in affirming informed consent when conducting interviewing research:

1. The participants should be informed what they are being asked to do, by whom, and for what purpose.
2. The participants should be informed of any risks and vulnerability they might be taking by participating in the research.
3. There should be an indication that participation in the research is voluntary and the participants have right to participate or not.
4. The participants should be informed that they have rights in the process, particularly the right to review the material and the right to withdraw from the process.
5. There should be an indication of anonymity

6. There should be an indication of how the results of the study will be disseminated.
7. Special conditions for children.

As indicated above, the guidelines were followed in this study.

Pertaining to the seventh point of informed consent, there are particular ethical problems associated with working with young children. Seidman (1998) identified that ethical issue as ‘the complexities of affirming written consent’. Robson (1999) argued that the issues are whether they can rationally, knowingly and freely give informed consent. Lindsay (2000) emphasises that it is a necessity to ensure that a child fully understands not only the short term implications of the research but also the long term. As this study involved some tasks associated with interviewing young children, the consent needed to be gained from adult gatekeepers such as the children’s parents, legal guardian or the children’s teachers as the children were considered too young to provide consent that was properly ‘informed’.

There are, however, commonsense ethical guidelines for treating children respectfully in interview situations. Brooker (2001) summarised this guidance in three main points. First, the interview questions should be appropriate and acceptable for the children; second, any session which causes distress of any kind to the respondents must be terminated; and third, the session should be concluded with debriefing, reassurance, thanks, praise or whatever is appropriate to sustain the self-esteem of the individual child. Again, the guidelines were followed in the present study.

Meanwhile, in discussing the ethical issue of data dissemination, Aubrey et al (2000) argue that the difficulties include not only the dilemmas involved in ensuring confidentiality, but also the added possibility that one's research may be seized upon and rendered overly simplistic in the press. These issues will be addressed when publications are produced from the thesis.

3.1 Research Design

The main primary method used in the data collection was in-depth face-to face semi structured interviews held with teachers, parents, administrators, policy maker and children. Hutchinson (1988) proposed that interviews permit researchers to verify, clarify, or alter what they thought happened, to achieve a full understanding of an incident, and take into account the 'lived' experience of participants. In addition, semi-structured interviews provide an elaborated in-depth response (Gillham, 2000).

Seidman (1998) argued that a basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experiences affects the way they carry out that experience. The semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews in this study were held with teachers, parents and administrators in order to assess their views on the definition of play and its contribution in children's learning process. The interview with the policy maker, specifically the Minister of Education, was conducted in order to consider if there is co-ordination between policy and practice in terms of their attitudes toward play.

In addition, throughout the pilot study, informal interviews with children were also considered as important in producing accurate results and therefore some interview sessions with children were added and the data resulting from those have also been analysed. The main purpose of conducting these interviews was to obtain a real impression regarding their feeling of going to school and gain further illustration of teaching-learning climates from the children's point of view.

Meanwhile, the second method used in collecting the data was the small-scale structured observation. The 15 single small-scale observations were intended to observe how play was implemented in classroom practice, teaching style and overall teaching learning climates in pre-school settings across five different type of pre-schools. The observation schedules, based on a category system, were used to observe teachers in terms of teaching style, learning activities and overall teaching-learning climates in the pre-school classroom.

Observation in this study was used to validate or corroborate the messages obtained in the interviews. According to Robson (1999), a major advantage of observation as a technique is its directness. In this study, the directness of observation can usefully complement information obtained by interview. This second method might provide evidence for certain queries. For example, even if the teachers might suggest through interview that they teach children through play, the observation might provide findings that there are discrepancies between what teachers say that they have done regarding 'teaching through play', and what they actually did in classroom practice.

In order to enrich the design, still photography was used to provide evidence to deepen information on current teaching style and the organization of classroom learning environment. Besides, the use of camcorder equipment in recording the actual situation of teaching-learning climates and children activities in pre-school classrooms was also available.

3.2 Instrument Design

3.2.1 Semi-structured Interview

The initial task was to develop semi-structured interview questions that were precise and comprehensive concerning the problem area so that the required data could be gathered and analysed. The interview questions for teachers covered questions on their understanding of the definition, concept and the role of play in children's learning; the use of play in teaching and learning; and barriers preventing deploying play in classroom practice (see **Appendix A**). The interviews with administrators also included the profiles of the pre-school under study, their philosophy, the curriculum, their comments on the method of teaching young children and their perception toward children's play (see **Appendix C**). Meanwhile, interviews with parents involved their perceptions on play as pedagogical tools, reasons for sending their children to a certain type of pre-school; and their preferred activities for the children either more academic or play-based (see **Appendix B**).

The interview questions for this study were self-designed and some items were adopted from other instruments used in previous research similar to this study. Yet, the procedures were adapted to suit the purpose of this study. The interview

questions were pre-tested through a pilot study in order to test the initial procedures of collecting the data. According to Robson (1999), pilot study helps researchers to throw up some of the inevitable problems of converting their design into reality. The main purpose of the pilot interview was to test the questions and to check the clarity of the items or the contents of the questions before they were used in examining teachers' and parents' understanding of the concept of play in child development and education. Besides, it was also an opportunity to practise transcribing data and checks the accuracy of interview notes with respondents particularly items to be quoted in the report. Pilot respondents' comment and feedback were taken into account to improve the quality of the questions while recognising if any major important items were missing. In addition, the pilot interview was also useful in estimating how long the interview would last.

The interview questions had been piloted with two Malaysian teachers living in the UK who had experience as elementary school teachers in Malaysia and working with young children. The interview questions were piloted also on two Malaysian mothers living in the UK and having experience in sending their children into some types of Malaysian pre-schools involved in this study.

Generally, all four respondents had no problems in understanding the questions. The time for each interview session was between 45 minutes and one hour. However, taking into account feedback from respondents, some interview questions for both parents and teachers were altered and others added. The table 3.1 gives details of the alterations and additions made to the interview questions for both types of respondents.

In one session of the interviews, it happened that a parent's child came into the conversation room. Spontaneously, I asked him about his feeling going to pre-school and the learning situation in the classroom. From here, it was realised that interviewing children themselves was worthwhile and should be included in the main study.

Table 3.1:

Alterations and Additions to the Interview Questions

Interview for parents	Interview for teachers
<p>1) Added a question on <i>parents' understanding of early childhood education</i> and put as a preceding question of the interview.</p> <p>2) Addition of the phrase '<i>play in general or out of classroom</i>' in question 5 to avoid parents explaining about children learning through play in classroom context only</p> <p>3) Addition of some probes and prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Q2: parents' expectation from pre-school - Q3: Knowledge of parents on the method of how the school educates their children and what the children learn in school. - Q4: Definition of play, time spent for play with children at home and awareness of children learn through play. <p>4) Replacing the phrase '<i>cognitive skills</i>' from a probe in Q5 by '<i>intelligence skills</i>' that was more appropriate to parents' understanding.</p>	<p>1) Added one question (Q6) taking into consideration that this question is one of the important missing items in examining teachers' understanding of children learning through play: "How/what do you think children learn through play." <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How can you tell? - How do you know? </p> <p>2) Addition in question 7: "<i>What, in your view, distinguishes play from other activities/ task?</i>"</p> <p>3) Added question 9:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experiences, qualification and training as pre-school teachers - Socio-economic background of parents/ pre-school children <p>4) Addition of some probes/prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Q3: The suitability of the curriculum contents to the needs of child development.

The amended interview questions were submitted to two lecturers in early years education at the University of Warwick. This was to reassure the validity of the interview questions and obtain feedback regarding their content. The interview questions were translated into Malay Language, so the Malaysian pre-school teachers and parents would be able to have a better understanding of the questions asked, hence able to answer the questions precisely and comprehensively. Two experts in English-Malay-English translation in a University in Malaysia endorsed the content validity of interview questions translation process (see **Appendix P: Letters of Endorsement**)

3.2.2 A Small Scale Category-based System Observation

The second task was to develop observation schedules that combined two criteria: category based-system and anecdotal recording. The observation instruments had been piloted in a mini project task conducted in three different types of pre-school in England (see Mastura Badzis and Lindsay, 2002). In the present study, the contexts for the category based-system of observation were the same as the above study: the date, the time of the day, the length of the investigation and the activities in which the class was engaged. In terms of the content of observation the previous study involved four variables as the main categories of the data collection: type of play activities, teachers' involvement in play and organising for play. However, some amendments were made to the contents of observation in the present study and the new variables involved were: teaching organisation and play status, as the focus of observation was on the status of play implemented in the classroom not on teachers'

involvement or type of play activities as was done previously (see **Appendix F: Observation Schedules**).

3.3 Population and Sample

The population in this study refers to all pre-schools in Malaysia. The pre-schools in Malaysia are organised and set up throughout the country by various agencies and providers. This has resulted from historical sequences of events of which may be traced back some fifty-two years. Consciousness that there was no balance in the development of pre-school institutions and awareness of the necessity for early education for young children led many providers and agencies from government and non-government sectors to come forward to establish pre-school centres in the 1970s and 1980s.

Table 3.2:
Number of Kindergartens, Teachers and Enrolment by Agency for 2000

Agency	Number	Classes	Teachers	Enrolment	%Enrolment
ABIM (MYM)	329	801	1004	20869	3.44
State Religious Department	190	424	526	13956	1.7
National Unity Department	1058	1058	1058	30456	3.8
KEMAS	6846	7725	7672	204720	25.5
Private	2461	Not available	24164	507282	63.1
Ministry of Education	1053	1116	1116	26718	3.3
Total	11937	11124	35540	804001	100.00

Sources: Data Unit, Educational Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education
Malaysia (April 2001)

As shown in Table 3.2, in 2000, Malaysia had 11,937 preschools organised by different type of providers; government, quasi-government and private institutions. However, this amount does not include other types of pre-schools established by other non-government organisations such as university-based, religious, voluntary, welfare community and also political institutions. Based on the report by EPRD, MOE (1984) there were 31 agencies which provided pre-school programmes in Malaysia.

Table 3.3:
Distribution of Pre-schools by Location and Type

Type of Pre-schools Total (n) = 5	Pre-school Location			
	Urban	Suburban	Rural	Industrial Estate
University-based	1	1	1	
State Religious Department		2	1	
Muslim Youth Movement (NGO)		1		2
National Unity Department		1		2
Private	2			1

It is undeniable that the larger the sample the lower the likely error in generalising the findings. However, due to time constraints, financial limitation and the nature of the requirement in fulfilling this study, it was not able to select pre-schools from all the agencies. Nevertheless, selection of the samples was based on specified criteria. First, these samples were representative of the various agencies or types of organisations in which they belong. Second, the locations of the samples were in both rural and urban areas (see Table 3.3). In order to fulfil these criteria, a purposive stratified random sampling was used for this study. This involved dividing the population into a number of groups with similar characteristics then random

samplings within the groups (Robson, 1999). In the first stage, the pre-schools were stratified according to the types of organisation to which they belonged, while in the second stage the pre-schools were stratified according to their location. This strategy was also considered as purposive because I used my judgement to build up the sample to satisfy my specific needs in this study. After stratifying the samples, the total of pre-schools and the locations involved in this study were obtained through a process of simple random sampling.

3.4 **The Respondents**

Teachers, administrators, parents, the policy maker and children were the subjects of this study for interviewing purposes. In terms of observational method of data collection, the randomly selected 15 teachers and their teaching-learning climates in pre-school classroom were the target for obtaining the data.

3.4.1 **The Pre-school Teachers**

Table 3.4
Distribution of Teachers by Experience

Type of Pre-schools	Teaching Experiences (Teachers n=30)					
	Less than 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	More than 20 years
University-based		3		3		
State Religious Department		2	4			
Muslim Youth Movement (NGO)		2	3	1		
National Unity Department			3		1	2
Private	1	3	1			1

A total of 30 teachers (two from each of 15 pre-schools) were involved in this study. Six teachers represented each of 5 types of the chosen pre-school settings. These teachers varied in terms of their teaching experiences and qualifications. Tables 3.4 and 3.5 show the distribution of teachers by experience and higher academic qualification.

Table 3.5
Distribution of Teachers by Higher Academic Qualification

Type of Pre-schools	Academic Qualification					
	LCE	O Level (MCE)	A Level (HSC)	Diploma	Degree	Master
University-based		3			2	1
State Religious Department		6				
Muslim Youth Movement (NGO)		5	1			
National Unity Department	1	4	1			
Private	1	3		2		

3.4.2 The Pre-school Parents

From the 15 randomly selected pre-schools (according to type and location) 30 parents either father or mother of pre-school children in the school year of 2002 were randomly selected to be involved in this study. Two parents from each of 15 pre-schools were interviewed. These parents varied in terms of their educational qualification, income status and socio-economic background. However, no attempt was made to get equal numbers of parents according to their socio-economic status or level of education.

3.4.3 The Pre-school Administrators

Fifteen administrators, one from each of the 15 settings were involved in this study. Of them, 4 were head teachers, 5 were co-ordinators, 3 were managers and 3 were principals.

3.4.4 The Policy Maker

In order to gain perspectives from policy maker, one education official working at the Ministry of Education specifically the Minister of Education was also included in this study. It has been argued that some policy makers or administrative officers of early years education themselves do not understand the concept of play in children's learning development (Anning, 1998).

3.4.5 The Pre-school Children

The pre-school children in this study referred to 12 children randomly selected across 5 different types of setting. These children that attend the settings are from the age range between 4½ to 6 years old.

3.5 The Settings

The sampling frame of this study involved 15 pre-schools in the state of Selangor and Kedah, Malaysia from five different types of agencies. This included three Ministry of National Unity and Community Development preschools as

representative of government funded, three university based pre-schools as representative of quasi-government institution, three Muslim Youth Movement ABIM preschools as NGO representative, three private pre-schools and three State Religious Department pre-schools. All the settings were stratified in terms of location, either urban or rural area. The observations conducted in each of the 15 settings lasted one day, between two to three hours of morning or afternoon session.

3.6 The Data Collection Procedure

Since the study was to have been done in two states Selangor and Kedah, the researcher had applied permission from the State Education Department of both countries stating the school intended as the first step. The next step after obtaining the letter of approval was approaching the pre-schools seeking permission from the head teachers, principals or managers either by writing or through telephone conversation.

The data were collected in three stages. First, by visit or telephone to the schools, explaining the aims of the study and to establish a good rapport and relationships; and then to agree date and time for interview. During the visit, the researcher also arranged with the pre-school administrators the matter of interviewing parents. Generally, the parents were randomly chosen and determined by the head teachers to be involved in the study.

Second, the researcher conducted the interviews with six teachers, three administrators and six parents in each type of pre-school giving around 75

respondents. Interviews with teachers, parents and administrators took between 45 minutes to one hour each. At 15 interviews per week this suggested around 5 weeks required for basic data gathering. Some parents were interviewed at home while some other interviews were conducted in school. The majority of the teachers and the administrators preferred to be interviewed in the school office. All the interview sessions were tape-recorded for the process of transcribing the data. Meanwhile, the interview with a policy maker was to be conducted after the agreed appointment was made by telephone. However, owing to certain circumstances, the interview was not run on a face-to-face basis. Instead, the interview questions were faxed to the Minister's office and the feedback answers were also received in a written form (see **Appendix E & O**).

The third stage was related to the observational method of data collection. These small-scale observations were made throughout the pre-school session, once for each of the 15 pre-school across 5 different types of settings, over two weeks.

3.7 The Data Analysis Procedure

The tape-recorded interviews from each of the five groups of respondents (teachers, administrators, parents, policy maker and children) were transcribed and analysed using traditional method of qualitative analysis.

The following steps were undertaken in analysing the interviewing data:

1. The data were transcribed (word by word). Some interviewees' answers considered as 'out of topic' were ignored.

2. The data transcriptions which was written in Malay Language were translated carefully into English and written in a '*special form*' (sort of summarising the contents of the answer) but still using the interviewees' words/phrase (without changing the style/structure of interviewees' language) (see example: **Appendix G**)
3. All the data which were transcribed in that special form were read carefully, then the important words or phrases for each of the interviewing answers or prompts were highlighted and summarised (see example: **Appendix H**).
4. The data were analysed according to the chronological number of each participant. For eg: Responses for Q1, Q2... answered by teacher 1, T2, T3...were... (step by step)
5. Similarities and differences among respondents were identified with reference to their answers to each number of interview questions (see example: **Appendix I**)
6. Classification for each phrase mentioned by interviewees was made by giving specific code/title. For example: "*Play gives opportunity for children to make friends*" ⇒ This phrase was put under 'social development'

OR

"Before the lessons getting started, I usually allow children to play first. Then, after they feel happy and comfortable, I would be starting the formal lesson and I would have asked them to write down what they've learn in the exercise books provided"

⇒ This phrase was put under 'Play then work'.

The percentage or numbers of interviewees for each phrase/topic was then calculated or counted.

7. Overlapping answers were identified throughout the interview from Q1 till the end and highlighted. For example, I might find the answers of Q2 further explained under the answers of Q5 and so on....
8. Discussions of the results. Answers were recognised according to the theme. The themes or sub-themes were identified and presented the data according to the theme. (See **Appendix J**: example of thematic organisation in data analysis)
9. Some examples of the full script of several data transcriptions translated in English were prepared.

The data gained from observation schedules were also analysed using traditional method of qualitative analysis. In analysing the observation schedule used in this study, the raw data in a form of words and anecdotal recording were transferred into summary sheet tables (see **Tables 7.1**: 165 and **7.2**: 169). Through those summary sheet tables, the data were converted into what is referred to as a 'write up'.

CHAPTER 4:

ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' RESPONSES

4.0 Introduction

There were 30 teachers interviewed in this study whereby 6 teachers represented each of 5 types of the chosen pre-school settings. In terms of teaching experience, they are varied among the sample; from one-month to 24 years teaching experiences. Each interview, which lasted about 45 minute to one hour, was tape-recorded and transcribed. From the total of 30 interviews, only 3 of them were conducted in English. Thus, the rest of the transcribed data were translated into English. Then, all the 30 transcriptions were analysed using a traditional method and procedure of qualitative data analysis as has been described and elaborated earlier in the previous chapter.

Following analysis of the answers from all 11-interview questions, the teachers' responses were categorised into five major themes:

1. Meaning and Concept of Play
2. Play Allocation
3. Curriculum Aspect
4. Teaching Style
5. Resolution

Each theme was subdivided into several relevant topics. The example of analysis of classification of teachers' responses is being presented in **Appendix I**. Therefore

teachers' understanding of the concept of play could be addressed and discussed through the following issues.

4.1 Play Meaning and Concept

4.1.1 Play Significance

In order to examine their basic understanding of the concept of play, the 30 teachers interviewed in this study were being asked how they define play and what did they understand by the word play in children's world. According to teachers' definitions, play had different, often multiple, significance:

'When a child play, she/he can communicate with friends, get experiences, tell about...I guess play is not play...keep quiet. When the children are playing we can see their mouth 'chet,chet,chet'...[cannot stop from talking]. '

'Play is something natural for children. They like to play. That is their nature they just want to play. They like it, they feel free, and they can do what they want to do...'

'For me, play is to open children's mind. Let say we have gym, we can see them; cooperation, discipline. If they want to play something it should be rules and you have to follow the rules.'

'Play means you give them skills. Let say if you let children playing cars, they can see that wheels are round shaping (sic); then they'll pull out all car parts, and then fix them back...'

Even though the above statements revealed that each teacher holds a personal construct about play, there appeared to be some typical features about play which include the following key elements:

1. Enjoyment and fun for children
2. Children's needs and natural tendency
3. Relationship to learning, experiences, knowledge, skills and mind development
4. The concept of freedom
5. Communication and socialization

In constructing the meanings of play, 26 out of 30 teachers interviewed produced at least one of the five elements listed above. One private pre-school teacher attached play to only one element: *"Play... when we say play, its just play for the sake of play. It's only for enjoyment"*. There were some teachers who did not mention any of the elements 'wordly', but the element came as implicit meaning. This statement is one example, *"what I understand by play yeah; children when play, they run, jump, that's all. That's play for them. They did not understand learning through play. That would be endless play. Those are children!"* This statement might reflect that play is sort of enjoyment and natural for children.

Nevertheless, one of the teachers interviewed could not give a clear definition of play and mentioned none of the 5 key elements above either explicitly or implicitly. Instead of defining play, the teacher said: *"play is alright for children but not too much and not always. Play... uh... if we let children play while learning in the classroom, I feel it's no..."*

Another teacher from a religious-based pre-school was also not elaborating what she meant by play whereby she only stated “*play has many definitions*”. However, she then continued by saying, “*learning through play is like play flash card and all that*” which means that she tried to relate play to academic learning purposes. This teacher is actually one of 3 teachers that see play as related to academic learning function. “*Play is not play without any purpose. Play should be a purpose. For example, play plasticine to instruct children shaping ABC or if they are playing with numbers, we ask them to arrange it from 1-10. That is play...*” illustrated that, a teacher from a government-based pre-school views the same notion.

Meanwhile, there were also some teachers who relate play to learning but the context of play in their opinion is as a tool for removing boredom. A statement by a religious-based pre-school teacher revealed this scenario, “*...I think play is also quite important in learning scheme. That’s to avoid children from the feeling of boredom – keep on holding pencil, writing...*”

4.1.2 Play Roles and Value

In order to get a deeper perception towards play concept, teachers were also asked to elaborate their view of its roles and values as a follow-up question after their definition of play. Apparently, 27 teachers’ responses revealed that they do recognise play as having a great value and playing a big role in constructing child development. They were clear view about its defining quality and what it does for children. Here are some examples of their quotations:

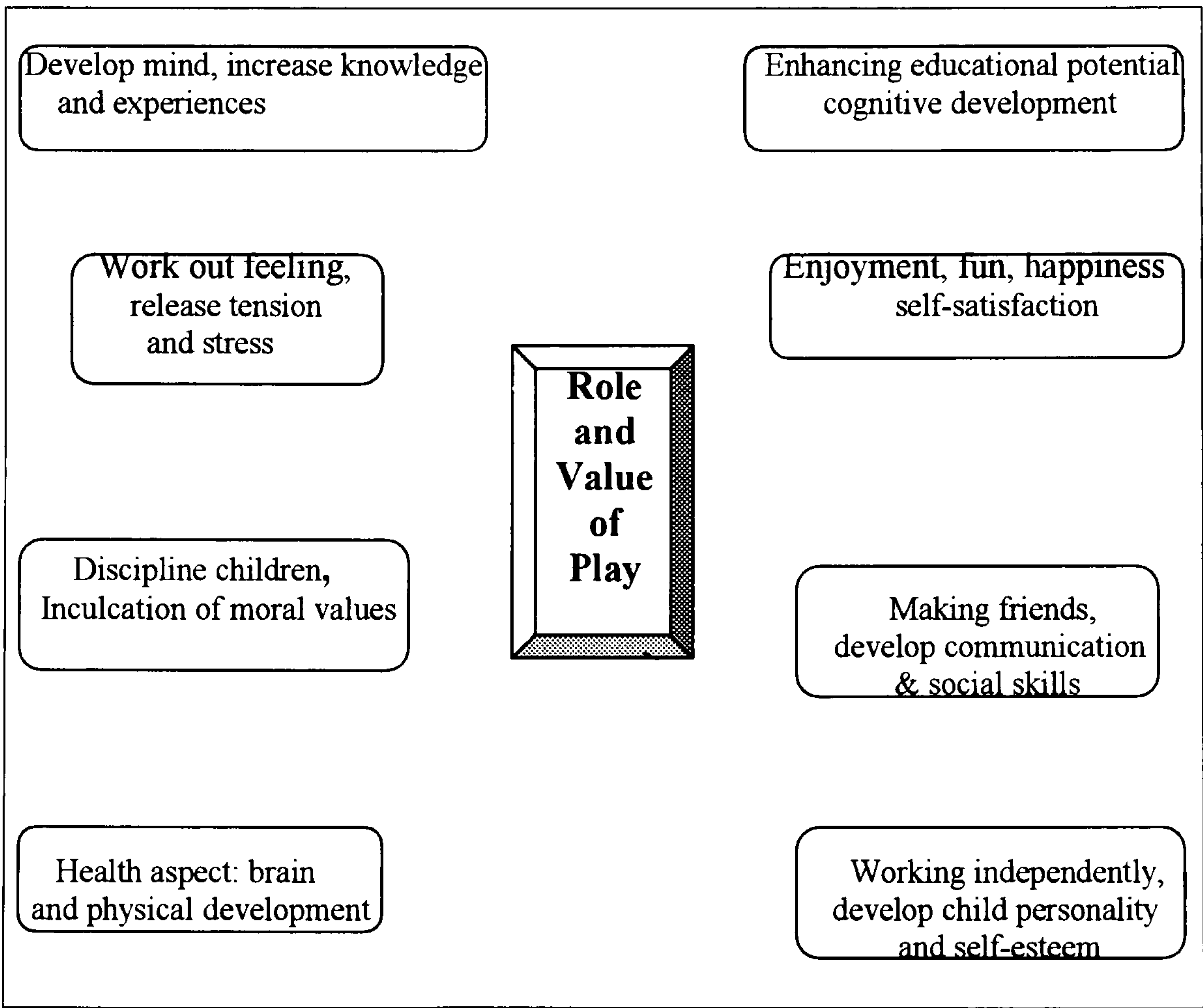
‘Ump...fun...uh...if children play they are happy. From this happiness they can get something that they would never get from books. In play there are also some situations... easier for children to express their original feeling... ’

“ Beside fun, children also get lessons... they learn something. Let say if they play in-group, they learn how to tolerate, co-operate and that are moral values. In terms of educational values, they learn how to count, - that’s for cognitive or math...lay...”

“It’s inculcated! It is! Their mind, they are beginning to think in a creative mind. Able to think for themselves...”

Figure 4.1 below indicates summary of teachers’ identification of 8 main roles and values of play.

Figure 4.1: Key Areas of Role and Value of Play



Generally, responses from teachers identified at least one of the key areas listed in the above figure. There seems to be a significant relationship between teachers’ definition of play and their views of play roles and values. Nevertheless, 3 out of 30

teachers interviewed have narrow views towards play role and value which for them is limited to either recreational or 3R competence,

“Its role for me... What I can see, when they are playing for example playing clay; may be they are shaping something like jet or letter. That’s what I see. Then, if we give them shell, they are not only tossing it up but may be also they could count how many is two, how much is three, counting from 1-10, assembling groups...”

4.1.3 Play Contribution to Child Development

It is interesting to know what knowledge or information teachers have concerning the contribution of play to child development. Digging out what teachers know pertaining to this matter might add richer information and become important points in examining teachers’ understanding of the concept of play itself.

Throughout the interview, only one out of 30 teachers could explain exclusively how play contributes to overall and holistic development of children. After explaining it in detail for about two pages of transcription, this teacher then added:

“ As I mentioned before, it covered all aspects: social, physical, cognitive, language and interaction, communication. It does really contribute towards that development through activities that I explained before. One other thing that I can see is that play also contribute not only on the 6 components but also towards critical thinking then special intelligent...”

This university-based pre-school teacher is the only teacher who has a degree and Masters in Early Childhood Education. Another teacher from the same setting has her personal opinion whereby she relates play contribution to type and stage of play,

“ Ok...ok...the first, there are several type of play. Individual play, parallel play, group play, you know. So, if we look into these variety types of play, we will have different aspect of development. Let say, if we want children to be co-operative – there is interaction among others – we let them play things that they can do it all together...”

Many teachers perceived play as being valuable and contributed in developing skills, however, the answer did not show that they really confident about what they were talking about. Even though they were supported by a prompt such as ‘*what aspect of child development do you think are helped through play? Does it develop cognitive- physical – emotional...?*’; socialisation and emotional development were the most frequently mentioned while language and communication appeared to be mentioned only by 10 out of 30 teachers. Table 4.1 shows the most frequent answers mentioned and elaborated by the teachers.

Table 4.1

What aspects of child development do you think are helped through play?

Responses	Teachers n = 30
Social and moral development	21
Emotional development	19
Intellectual and mind development	13
Cognitive development	13
Physical development	15
Language and communication development	10
Academic performance	6

Surprisingly, instead of explaining how play contributes to child development, one of the teachers interviewed lamented:

“ I’m not good enough in answering this question but I think if the children playing too much, they can’t develop their thinking. They just think of playing not care about anything else...”

This answer might be due to the situation whereby in the preceding question, she perceived play as something that did not have much educational value.

Generally many of the teachers when they were asked this question, they rarely said the precise words ‘cognitive development’ or ‘social development’ etc., but the answers were sort of describing the events or situations that reflected those developments. For example, a teacher from NGO pre-school explained: “ *I think play look like ... it helping child. She/he learn how to be patient; for example when play, children are grabbing, so, he/she supposed to be patient; that’s for his public relation knowledge, he/she must not fight...*” while a private pre-school teacher responded: “*It can... let say if a child fall down, another child would help him/her. So, there is co-operation, collaboration...*” Responses from both teachers revealed that play contributes to social and emotional development of children but the way it was being described is different. Furthermore, there is also no mention of either the word ‘social’ or ‘emotion’ from either teacher.

4.1.4 Play and Work

Play is considered as being fun and enjoyable; whereas work is labelled as serious, rigid and even stressful activity for young children.

“ *Umm... maybe the method of play itself. Uh... play form is more ‘loose’ yeah. So children have opportunity to explore, so, and then it’s not rigid and then various outcomes and not specific to only one (objective). Compared to activity that we instruct them let say folding paper; the outcome is to come out with one object...*”

proposed one teacher from a university-based pre-school.

Another teacher, from the same pre-school tried to present an example related to this issue,

“ *If there are two pre-schools, one is very structured, very academic... (Children) sit down beside table doing workbook; while another one is activity-based. So the pre-school that activity-based is eventually reflected Learning Through Play. If the first one based on workbook... based on teacher-centred activity, that is not a reflection of Learning Through Play*”.

A government pre-school teacher self-assuredly stated:

“The difference is play ... sort of free. Children can do what they want. It depends to them what shape they want to form or what play they wanted to involve in. We don’t have any objection what they want to play, depends to them. So, they are free. If learning (work) they should listen to what teachers said...”

Figure 4.2 illustrates contrasts between play and work as addressed by the majority of teachers interviewed.

Figure 4.2: Play distinguished from work or other activities

Play	Work
Various outcomes	One particular outcome
More ‘loose’, creative activity	Formal, rigid, instructed/ directed by teacher
Child – initiated	Teacher-initiated
Enjoy and fun	Stress and bored
Free	Imprisoned
Well-managed children’s behaviour	Lost of control
With materials/ no need particular workbook	Drills using workbook or textbook
Children: eagerness and willing to learn	Children: slow, lazy, no mood
Interested, alert, motivated, delighted	Sad face, silent

However, 6 out of the 30 teachers interviewed have different impressions, not stated in figure 4.2 about what distinguished play from work or any other activities. One teacher in a religious-based pre-school did not give any response and it seemed that she did not know what to talk about while another teacher from private pre-school

stated that she cannot see any difference between play and work, *“That’s no difference actually. Play is to rest their mind. For other activities... Umm... it sort of no different. Common. No difference.”* “Not much difference,” said a university-based teacher, *“only that play is something that delighting the children. When we say reading or other task, it’s being conducted on individual child”*

A government pre-school teacher had the same opinion as the previous university-based pre-school teacher in terms of labelling play as ‘group activity’. She argued, *“Task or work is when it’s time for task activity while play is when there is group activity. Group activity is more on play. If individual activity, it’s more on learning, doing task, using the provided workbooks...”* However, the rest of her comments revealed that she believed that play is enjoyment and fun activity to the extent that children did not realise that the time passed them by, while children looked ‘no mood’ in finishing their work.

Exceptionally, one teacher from religious-based pre-school viewed play in terms of its negative effect on children’s learning. She was trying to prove it by performing such example,

“The difference... if a child is dawdling over play, surely he/she won’t finish work. Certainly the work is not going to be completed... In my class, there is one child who is very slow in doing his work. When the others finish their work and play, this child absorbed in watching his friends playing around. So, his work surely not finish!”

The sixth teacher that had a personal view regarding play and work, different from the majority, is one NGO pre-school teacher whereby she commented that play is sort of recreational,

“I think doing work is important while play is to occupy leisure time. Working or learning is definitely very important. Play is for enjoyment. Work or learn is to understand something, so we have to do it properly”.

4.1.5 Perceptions towards Teaching and Learning Through Play

Generally, as mentioned earlier, almost all teachers responded positively when they were asked about the contribution of play to child development as well as its roles and significance in children’s world. The teachers appeared to readily accept that young children need to play, that play is intrinsically motivated and supremely satisfying for children. However, when the questions were related to the significance of teaching and learning through play in pre-school classrooms, 80% of the responses indicated a marked discrepancy between the stated value of play and play in classroom practice. They seem to believe that play is something to do ‘instead of learning’ and therefore they claimed that time should be divided between play and learning.

“ In my opinion, we divide time. Ok. This time is for play. When the time is up, we ask them to stop and we ask them to continue learning...”

“ For me, it should be balance between play and learning...”

Moreover, when they were asked to comment on two opposite opinions; **“play is valuable and very important”** or **“children are wasting their time in pre-school by playing where they should be learning”** and whether they feel that **“the advent of the curriculum leads to the loss of time if it would be used for play”**, typical comments were: *‘play should be in limited time’, ‘ not too much play’ or ‘not keep on playing all day’*. The main opinion pointed out by 19 out of 30 teachers was that

if play is to be allocated in classroom practice it would not be considered as wasting time so long as it took up a minority of the time.

“ If me, I just give them time to play as short as possible...I don't say it wasting time but I don't let them play until half an hour. We give them a little bit of time to play might be 'in passing' or while sitting, then we continue on learning...not much play” explained one teacher from a non government pre-school. Another teacher from government-based pre-school had the same view, *“Play sometimes bring into education...but if play exceeded it cannot be! There should be a limit (of time) in play. If there is no limited time in play, better no play!”* In line with these opinion, one religious-based pre-school teacher also commented: *“If we let them playing, people say 'wasting time' but too much play indeed wasting time! For me, if the work is finished, then only then they can play...”*

The above perception might have resulted from a belief that knowledge and skills can best be learned if they are transferred from teacher to student through didactic teaching. They seem to draw a distinction between children's play and 'real' learning such as counting, naming letters, printing and reading. One private pre-school teacher commented:

“I think yes, personally I think yes (loss of the time) if so much plays .I know no doubt that they will learn but then, they will take up so much on playing. So, what about your reading, writing, language and all that? ...”

This belief, in point of fact, leads to another phenomenon whereby some teachers viewed that play is not wasting the time if children were taught academic play which

for them is ‘the only favourable and beneficial play’. In relation to this matter, one teacher noted:

“I think it’s not wasting time because when we ‘teach’ them playing, we did not teach them play that has no benefit. We teach them play that also concluded as academic lesson. Let say we teach them songs, the songs are related to numbers, letters, for their sake... I think that kind of play wouldn’t be a problem...”

In another respect, one of the state religious department pre-school teachers emphasised that children are supposed to know the objective of coming to school is to learn and listen to teacher, not to play. Another teacher from the same type of pre-school added: *“For me play at home is enough. So, why not they concentrate on learning when they come to school? ...”*

The issue that children should not need to play in school because they have lot of opportunity to play at home was actually also raised by some other teachers. *“I’m not confident because if we let children play in school... then at home they also have a lot of opportunity to play. I think it’s not necessary then...”* one teacher uttered. The other teacher from a private pre-school acknowledged that play at home is not the same as play in school in terms of ‘making friends’ but she emphasised: *“But for me if they come to school only to play it surely wasting of time...”*

Meanwhile, 11 out 30 teachers viewed the necessity of play is basically to avoid children from getting bored and to release the tension and stress of learning. They came out with such reasons because play is seen as driven by pleasure and fun, however, it is a non-productive activity. One teacher from a university-based pre-school for example frankly stated that she sometimes feels not quite comfortable letting children play in pre-school classroom whereby she is supposed to ‘teach’

them but in other situations she feel that she should let the children play because they are getting bored, otherwise: *“children didn’t want to do their work”*, she said. In line with her view, one private pre-school teacher also expressed the same opinion,

“... sometimes we cannot let them just play... but for young children we are supposed to emphasise play, play is quite important... a bit important... if they keep on learning they would feel bored”

On the other hand, there were also some teachers who tend to relate the appropriateness of LTP to the chronological age of children. They consider that teaching through play is more suitable for ‘day care nursery’ children, new entering school children or less able children. In explaining the appropriateness of allocating learning through play in classroom practice, one religious-based pre-school teacher stated:

“ Waste of time, I guess for 6 years old, not suitable for them. That’s because they would be in Year 1 by next year and Year 1 emphasises on learning. How should we let them playing? They will feel that they are still small and no need for them to learn... learning through play can be implemented for children 3-5 years old...”

Another teacher from a university-based pre-school seems to have the same opinion but in a different context:

“... so, if the child is able, looked excited and seems that he/she already reach particular level, can receive properly the lessons, I would continue with more on drills. For the child who is not able yet to carry out the lessons, so, learn through play first...”

However this might reflect their narrow definition of play whereby it was perceived as limited to typical type of play activity like playing with plasticine, flash cards, puzzles etc.

Promoting LTP in the pre-school classroom was perceived by some other teachers as even more problematic given the different constraints in terms of demands on teachers' time and children's attitude, regardless of type of pre-school. Three teachers, each of them from different pre-schools claimed that play needs more time from teacher in terms of preparation and planning, and for them play could not be implemented as an immediate and sudden task. Meanwhile, more than 8 teachers interviewed raised the issue of children's disruptive behaviour or discipline problems that occurred during play such as “*a bit more noise*”, “*out of control*”, “*intervene others*” etc. These teachers also assumed that play could lead to ‘negative’ attitude or bad habit to children such as “*dawdling on play*”, “*wander from learning*”, “*thoughtfulness*” etc. This view is indeed influenced by their ‘orientation’ to play as a peer group social activity, not as activity which promotes learning. Consequently, some of the teachers interviewed appear to have low expectation of play and see it as time filler.

Generally, throughout the interviews, only 5 out of 30 teachers tended to have meaningful understanding the concept of play as foundation and appropriate approach for learning. These teachers presented confidently some precise reasons why they taught based on play and what are their perceptions toward LTP. One government-based pre-school teacher stated with poise that definitely learning is through play,

“Through play, let say ‘selling fruits’ there they learn some concept; heavy, light, money value, big amount, small amount, big, small and also they recognise colours, science concept with cognitive concept. Then, we can improve by asking them during role-play. There is no lost of the time because indirectly children are learning through play.”

“ ... For me, it's not wasting the time. But parents who didn't know what their children did and its results and outcomes, surely they feel that is wasting time...uh...but they have to know that is children's natural tendency, their needs and then, the third one that's for high level learning like creative thinking, problem solving; that's all are high level of learning, uh...exploring the space. That one we cannot teach them through academic learning that only 'sits beside table'. High level of cognitive thinking cannot be learned through that...Thus, because of the parents who hold firmly the concept that learning must be reading, writing, counting, we suppose to throw it actually!! We should change this paradigm...”

lamented one teacher from a university-based pre-school expressing her feeling assertively.

Another teacher, from the same university-based type of pre-school pointed out one interesting point whereby she related the importance and value of LTP to environment and time factor,

“ ... at present I think play is very very important and valuable for them because if we see the differences between children nowadays and children last 10, 20 years they are different because children nowadays is (sic) quite more aggressive compared to our time, ok. Maybe the factor is that in our time we have enough and sufficient time to go out for back watching, hunting the forest, at that time we can like exploring our own world. Kids nowadays they strictly have their own schedule. Let say, going home, sitting on the computer, they are only playing with the computer, watching TV and their time is taken by those sophisticated things compared to our time...”

4.2 Play Allocation

4.2.1 Purpose of Allocating Play in Teaching

All teachers in this study stated more than one purpose for allocating play in classroom practice. However as an impact of an understanding that play is an enjoyable activity which can be a 'relief tool', many teachers, twenty-one of them, felt that “release tension” and “removing bored” are the main purpose of allocating play in classroom practice. Other familiar phrases used by these teachers were “to

attract their attention, looking forward/enjoy to come to school” and “attraction for children to learn, so, they are motivated to do work and concentrate on learning”.

Hence play according to some teachers is a peer group social activity: nine of them view that they let children play so they could develop their social and interaction skills while at the same time they are happy and work out their stress of learning.

MB: *What purpose do you use play for?*

T25: *More through cognitive. Making the child feel good, happy but control. It is chartered environment, control environment, make the child feel happy. You can see, smile! They are very happy. Something that they like to do and look forward to come to school and meeting your (sic) friends. Through play with some co-operation, they don't fight, learning to share, they feel good...*

It was rare to get an answer from teachers that the main purpose of play is for fun learning for the sake of fulfilling children's needs and natural tendency, as was viewed by one university-based pre-school teacher, *“As I mentioned, first, fun learning and then second, related to children's instinct, because children are the object. So, we have to know what they want and they interested on. So, their natural tendencies...teach through play. That's the purpose of using play”* or increase creativity and helping children developing high level of cognitive thinking as what is meant by her colleague when she stated, *“... so, through play we can achieve such development that we couldn't get it through papers and pencils... ”.*

Even though 14 out of 30 teachers seemed to have the opinion that play increases cognitive outcomes, the majority related it to academic purposes that were limited to the development of reading, writing and counting. One private pre-school teacher

was among the minority teachers who believed that play increased cognitive awareness, *“play is quick to give them description of something (sic); so they can accept that description rapidly, clearly, accurately...”* while the opinion of one non government pre-school teacher or similar to her is the common one,

“ to simplify the process of teaching and learning. Make easier to achieve the objectives. Some times through play, look they are just playing... but at the same time when we asked them back what they’ve learned through that play, let say numbers or counting, they are likely to remember better...”

In other words, many of the teachers tended to allocate academic play in pre-school teaching rather than free play or play that provides chances to children to explore, develop curiosity and challenging their cognitive awareness. It is undeniable that this type of play activity is actually part of cognitive play whereby there is an element of learning to read and develop numeracy, however, there was no opportunity for play for the purpose of language development, sensory development and understanding physical world. Some children in some pre-schools have a chance to enhance their social and emotional development only during break or playtime, which was rarely to be guided by the teachers.

“... but even though we are not playing, we apply all these rules (social rules) during snack and drink time”

“ Even if we give them chances to play, I’ve already gave them 10 minutes to chat with friends and know each other... then, during break, they also meet their friends and play...”

4.2.2 Play Status and Frequency of Time to Play

Many of the teachers when they were asked about their current teaching style claimed that they are indeed teaching through play. However after further discussion regarding how they implemented play and examples of types of play, it was found

that these teachers were actually putting play as “doing something in passing” or “as alternate activity in finishing work” rather than the meaningful concept of “learning through play” whereby the play activity is the medium and foundation for learning. Hence play was regarded as fun activity that could remove the sense of boredom. The teachers sometimes allocate play sort of short fun action deployed while the academic learning occurred such as clapping hands, running on the spot, one minute physical exercise etc.

Besides, play also was accepted as “interval activity within a formal learning”. One of the teachers that used this style described,

“ ...there is also story-telling, as interval activity within a formal learning when the children are fed up. We exchange, so the children are pleased. When they feel bored of singing, we get back to formal learning. Then, we continue back...”

In other respects, in some pre-schools regardless of type, play was put as one of the compartmental subjects written in the timetable under the name of “art” and “physical education”. But, the teachers perceived them as core subjects compulsory to be taught and not as play, LTP.

Table 4.2 below summarises the play allocation in classroom practice. However, categories of responses are not mutually exclusive, hence some teachers illustrated it in more than one situation. The image of play as illustrated by teachers in the table below ranged from the simple joy of playing through to the incidental learning opportunity in which play sometimes provided learning.

Table 4.2: Status of Play in Classroom Practice

Play Status	Teachers n=30
Parallel play with academic-based activity then rotated	5
Free choices parallel play activities	2
Well-planned and structured academic play	3
As foundation or medium for learning	4
As a reward	5
Play then work/work then play	15
Interval or alternate activity within a formal learning	6
Play in passing while learning a formal lesson	12
No play during teaching and learning time	1

The results in Table 4.2 above reveal that many teachers favoured allocating play as activity before or after work. “ *We give them opportunity to play right before the formal class started or during break, but only if they finish their work. Finish work first then you can play*”, explained one teacher from a government-based pre-school. Hence, 15 out of 30 teachers put play as ‘play then work’ or ‘work first then play’; consequently, many of the teachers divided time between learning and play. There were two separate times: time to play and time for learning. Usually time for learning lasted longer while time to play was provided for about five to ten minutes before the formal lessons or after the period of a particular lesson that was about to finish.

The second choice favoured by teachers was ‘play in passing’ while formal learning is occurred at the same time. The explanation by one NGO pre-school teacher given the description of how she put play during teaching and learning time,

“I just give them time to play as quick as possible...because they are quick to get bored. I don’t say it wasting the time but I did not let them play until about half an hour. We give them time to play may be in passing or while sitting. Then, we continue on learning. Not much play”.

In another topic of discussion she stated,

“They like to play while doing their work. But we know that is their level...they do their work but they play at the same time. That’s something common...doing work while play with something else. Talking to friend a little bit...”

In some circumstances, teachers granted play as reward of ‘real learning’ or doing work,

“Sometimes, it’s to persuade the children to do their work. Who finish their work early, they can play. It sort of...reward... But, with a condition that they have to do all corrects. When we do like this, it’s easier to deal with them...”

However, the term ‘reward’ actually has various functions, different from teacher to another. A private pre-school teacher also put play as a reward but in different context,

“When play, they compete each other. After that, they will get a present (reward), so they compete among them...depends also to their condition. If we doing it continuously, they will loss their mood...”

If play were put as alternate or interval activity, song and movement for example, usually it would be deployed only if there was a topic of particular subject associated with the song going to be taught and, in another situation, teachers tended to put play alternately, for example story-telling only if the children are ‘not in mood to learn’. Therefore, the purpose of conveying the story was not to let children learn something through the activity but only to avoid the sense of boredom.

Due to the situation whereby teachers put play as ‘play in passing while learning a formal lesson’, the play activity was engaged in for only two to five minutes within one hour. It is quite difficult then to assume the frequency of time provided for this kind of play in classroom practice because the status of play might be debated -

whether it could be considered as a ‘real play’ in child development. Even though about 17 out of 30 teachers indicated that they allocate play everyday, many of them actually put play as ‘play in passing’ rather than the meaningful context of ‘teaching through play’.

4.2.3 Play Activity, Materials and Function

Information regarding type of play activity allocated in pre-school was gathered indirectly when the teachers were explaining their current teaching style and classroom organisation. Besides, the teachers were also asked to give some examples of play activity they might have allocated in classroom practice. Generally, because of academic monitoring and the focusing on 3R achievement, the play activities mentioned by teachers seem limited to activities that are based on developing 3R and compartmentalised according to the subject taught. *“It depends on subjects...we see first which subject that suit the play...”* replied one teacher.

“ I always play cards. Choosing the cards, letter cards, ABC cards; either hanging the cards then ask them to choose and put in the pocket or I arrange the cards on the table and I ask them to choose which one is letter A, for example. Who get it first win... ”

explained another teacher describing example of type of play organised in the classroom.

Table 4.3 illustrates the most frequent type of play activity organised in the classroom.

Table 4.3

Typical Types of Play Activity Implemented in Classroom Practice

Play Activities Mentioned	Teachers n=30
Card Play	17
Play with natural materials	19
Manipulative play	10
Constructive Play	14
Song and movement	16
Role-play/acting	13
Story-telling	11
Pretend/make-believe play	4
Others	6

With reference to the above table, creative play was not listed as one of the play activities mentioned by teachers. As was mentioned in the previous section, creative play was put as one of the compartmental subjects in the schedules in almost all pre-schools regardless of type under the name of ‘art and craft’, ‘handcraft and creativity’ and so on. However there were about three teachers who mentioned about this type of play as examples of play organised in the classroom and not as a subject written in the timetable such as making ‘origami’ and scratching on papers.

Computer play was only mentioned by 4 out of 30 teachers interviewed and also not stated in the list because some pre-schools allocated it as “time filler” during break or after school activity while some others put it as a subject compulsory for children and have a special computer room to run the activity.

Generally play activities mentioned by teachers throughout the interviews referred to indoor play activity whereas outdoor play rarely occurred more than once or twice a week, and was usually described as a compartmental subject with a specific time on the timetable under the name of 'Physical Education'. Therefore it was not listed as one of the play types mentioned by teachers. In some pre-schools, physical play was not necessarily allocated outdoors and the large apparatus materials were put in a special room next to the classroom while in certain pre-schools it was called 'gym' with a specific time on the timetable and also allocated indoors. Meanwhile the word 'others' in the list referred to various types of play activity that were rarely mentioned and deployed by a small number of the teachers such as miniature-world play, beads threading, cooking activity, space exploring etc.

Generally, plasticine, cards, 'lego' and puzzles are the typical type of play materials used in teaching. Even though the table 4.3 showed that play with natural materials was the most frequent type of play allocated in classroom practice, there was no sand and water play except in one of the university-based pre-schools. The material used by most of the teachers typically was plasticine or clay while the function was limited to enhance 3R development. In fact, 11 teachers stated that they used plasticine purposely for numbers and letters shaping activity. The same scenario applied to card play whereby 12 teachers stated that they used card or asked children to play with cards as instructional materials to help children recognising numbers and letters.

In constructive play, the typical type of material used was small blocks, which mostly refer to LEGO while for manipulative play; puzzles were the most frequent

used rather than other manipulative toys. In some pre-schools, various kinds of manipulative and constructive play materials were available. However teachers did not use those materials during teaching and learning time. Instead, the materials were only used for ‘after school activity’ or as ‘time filler’ during playtime or break. Such kind of play was also not listed as play allocated in classroom practice even though the teachers mentioned it.

4.2.4 Space and Corners for Play

Information regarding space and corners for play were normally gathered through teachers’ explanations of classroom management. The teachers were asked to explain further the physical lay out of the classroom and provision of play if any. It seems that there is a consequence effect between teachers’ style of implementing play and provision of play corners in the classroom. Hence, many teachers put play as ‘play while learning’ or ‘play by passing’, 18 out of 30 teachers concur in their responses they have no play corners in the classroom. ‘Limited or narrow space’ is the common reason presented by teachers when they said that there were no play corners in their classroom.

“I think we don’t have. You can see! It’s narrow...the space is narrow. If it’s wide...they can play here and there...so they play out there. They might play here (in the classroom) that’s only for conversation, pray recitation...or light activity...if the space is wide, I can do play corner...”

replied one teacher from a state religious department pre-school. Owing to the mentioned reason, many teachers stated that they would shift the tables if they need spaces for certain learning activity.

In another situation, 7 out of 30 teachers stated that they did not have play corners but they do have play materials put in one corner whereby children come to play there or they just give children some toys to play with for the same reason, *“In the classroom we suppose to have that...we suppose to have play corners...but because of the impermissible classroom condition we just give them toys to play with when it’s the time to play...”* said one teacher from a government type pre-school. Another teacher from NGO pre-school also stated that there was a room where children can play and eat there, however the context is different because no play materials were provided for the children.

Some teachers, instead of describing play corners in the classroom, stated that they have subject corners rather than play corners and have such space to display children’s work.

“I prepare ABC corner for Malay Language subject, ‘JAWI’ (Arabic Alphabets) corner, drawing corner. There, I have something... ‘origami’ like bird or anything; I hang it together with children’s work...I also display children’s drawing which I see them quite nice...”

explained one teacher from a religious-based pre-school after describing in general arrangement of table and chairs in her classroom.

In other cases, teachers said that they did not provide play corners because it would lead to children’s disruptive behaviour or attitude problems, *“We do not have play corner because the children will intend to play more. We have some kind of play; snake and ladder, number games, drama play...no special corner”* said a private pre-school teacher.

Only 3 out of 30 teachers provided variety corners for play materials and activities whereby children have opportunities for free-play. It was very rare to have classroom arrangements as described by one teacher from a university-based pre-school,

“We have a floor plan that based on our learning principles. Our learning activity is based on the corner. So, the basic corner we have block and manipulative, then drama corner and language corner. For classroom activities usually we have the corner. Let say our children wanted to play the block and manipulative toys, so they have to go to that corner. For drama activity, we have our corner. For reading, we have language corner...”

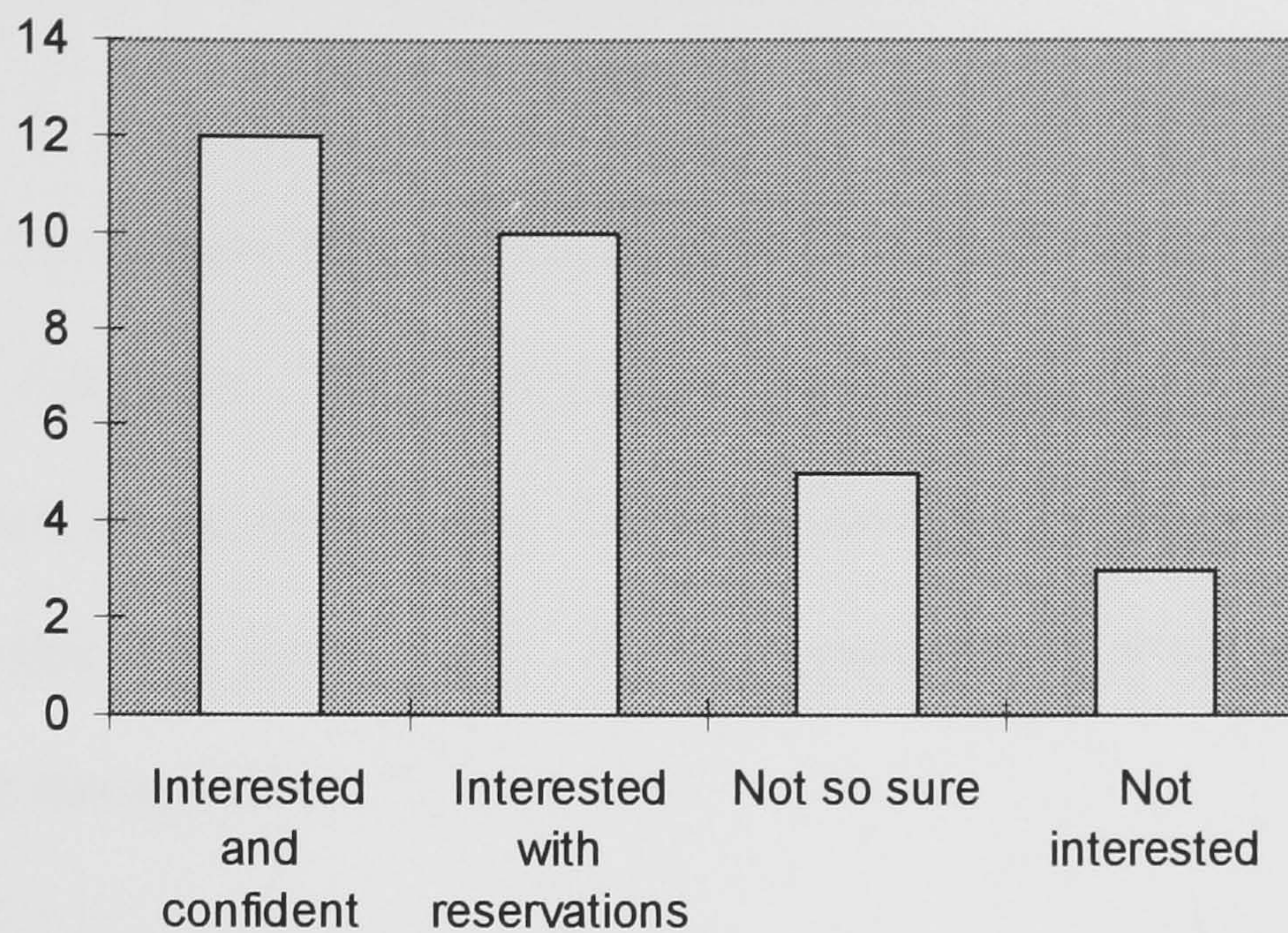
In terms of facilities for outdoor play space or physical play provision with large equipment, 16 out of 30 teachers stated that they have that kind of provision. Nevertheless, eight teachers described that type of facilities in their setting either ‘not available’ or ‘in poor condition’.

4.2.5 Willingness of the Teacher

In order to get more clarification regarding teachers’ attitudes towards play activities in classroom practice, they were asked specifically whether they were interested and willing to implement play in their teaching. Furthermore, the teachers were also asked how confident were they in using play as the approach of teaching young children. Three out of 30 teachers interviewed frankly stated that they are not interested in teaching through play. They preferred to teach in a formal way and they were also not confident that play is the suitable approach in teaching pre-school children. The graph in Figure 4.3 below illustrates teachers’ willingness of play implementation and represents the responses of 30 teachers.

Figure 4.3

Teachers' Willingness in Using Play



As indicated in figure 4.3 above, only 12 teachers stated that they were interested in implementing play in their daily teaching and were quite confident in terms of conducting the play activity; and in terms of believing that play is the appropriate approach in teaching young children. Generally, teachers with reservations admitted that they were interested in play provided that the play occurred in such terms and conditions. First, not too much play or not playing all day which was the same reason given by some of the teachers when they were asked whether play is valuable or wasting the time. “*I think I’m interested. I ‘m willing to implement play a bit! But, as I said before, not too much play*”, said one of these teachers.

The second condition refers to a situation whereby they were able to implement play but not for all subjects. Some of these teachers believed that play could not be applied in all subject areas while some others said that play depends on the suitability of particular subject topics and on children’s mood and condition, then only would

they be confident and willing to implement. In some situations, there were also reservations relating to the willingness of using play and the degree of confidence in their preparation and the provisions of play materials.

Also 5 among 30 teachers showed uncertainty of their willingness and confidence. “*I guess I can, I hope so...*” said one teacher. Another said something reflected that she is interested to implement play but then continue by saying phrase such as “*sometimes I feel that sense... uh... it’s not convenience to do that... even they play...learning through play...*”.

4.3 Curriculum Aspect

4.3.1 Knowledge on Pre-school Curriculum

It can be said that understanding pre-school curriculum as a whole is vital before examining part of it. Therefore, before exploring the place of play in the curriculum each teacher from every setting was asked at state general information regarding the content and the process of the curriculum that underpinned the current pre-school they are working at. “*I feel the curriculum is ok. It fulfil needs ... it covers language, socio-emotion, cognitive, physical, spiritual... but for the time being, we emphasise less on spiritual and Islamic Education...*” replied one teacher giving general description of the curriculum used in her setting.

Surprisingly, not all teachers have knowledge about what curriculum is. Some of them stated that they are not quite sure what is the curriculum and they have no knowledge about curriculum guidelines. Some thought the curriculum was the

textbooks they used in teaching while some others regarded play as ‘extra-curriculum’, unless it was part of physical education.

MB: *How do you feel about the curriculum content and process of this pre-school?*

T8: *I’m not really known about it. I don’t know either xxxx curriculum or school curriculum*

MB: *How did you teach and what did you based for teaching?*

T8: *I teach only based on scheme textbook because the syllabus is the book. I use only textbook for guidance. Later, the headteacher will give us timetable. I follow the guidelines (written) in the scheme textbooks....*

In other respects, some teachers did understand what curriculum is or they knew that their school had its curriculum for teaching but they could not explain it and they did not consider it as having importance. For example the response from one of the teachers revealed that she knows about the curriculum but she didn’t use it as the guidance in teaching, *“I’m not quite sure...I can’t remember. I have been teaching for a bit long time. So, I think I know...”*

In other cases, there were teachers who believed that learning from experience could underpin the approach to teaching without reference to the curriculum, *“I just read it briefly...it’s sort of book...I watch other experience teachers teaching in the classroom. So, I just follow what have they done...”* said one private pre-school teacher. When she was asked whether play concept is stated in the curriculum guidelines, she replied frankly,

“Actually I’ve not really read the curriculum properly. I’ve just looked into it briefly. Brief reading...I can’t remember...At present, I just refer to the books or based on my previous experience... or...I watch the head teacher teach the children. Generally, I refer to children’s book what I suppose to teach them...”

4.3.2 Appropriateness of the Curriculum

There were 13 out of 30 teachers who perceived their pre-school curriculum as “appropriate”, “suitable and relevant to children’s age”, “fulfil children’s needs” or “underpinned overall development”. One teacher from a religious-based pre-school stated,

“Right now the curriculum is ok. It suits the age and the level of the children, 6 years old. Even the books...most of the children can achieve, can follow...It fulfil the mental, physical and overall needs of the children.”

As explained in the previous section, six teachers stated they did not know or were not so sure what to say about the curriculum. The remaining eleven teachers apparently admitted the appropriateness of the curriculum but with some additional comments and even complaints of various aspects especially in terms of its heavy and advanced contents compared to children’s capability.

In relation to this matter, one teacher from a government-based pre-school stated:

“I think it’s quite advanced. Children could not catch up...they were left behind. We have to explain to children a lot. The curriculum is advance. Compared to children, they were quite slow...”

Meanwhile, another teacher from the same type of pre-school commented,

“So far, it certainly fulfil children’s needs, but...if we follow what are in the textbooks or workbooks, we have no time to implement all. The problem here is the use of textbook and workbook...”

An interview with one of the teachers from NGO pre-school further substantiates the findings on the appropriateness of the curriculum,

“This pre-school curriculum guideline is quite good in terms of its subjects. We have all subjects; Malay Language, English, Science and all. All are complete, similar to year 1 primary school lesson...”

But, when this teacher was probed further on the matter she said,

“For me 5 and 6 years old children are still thinking of play. But if we refer to our situation nowadays parents put more importance on their children’s academic achievement. They give priority to let their children to be brainy, they didn’t think about play. They send their children here because this school is focus much on learning rather than play!”

An interview with one of university-based pre-school teacher seems to provide the same notion,

“I feel that the curriculum is quite heavy for children...uh (sigh) because in terms of reading (outcome), children can read short sentences and the children here, with our activities...how many more time that we need? But, we cannot force the children...”

This teacher added other comments related to teachers’ professionalism. According to her, teachers should have been trained well on how to apply the curriculum into the real classroom teaching.

As a follow-up question, the teachers were also asked to explain their solutions for matching curriculum to children’s needs. Every teacher had a different view on resolving this conflict. Some said that they would sort it out through individual guidance. Others suggested overcoming it by involving parents working with their children. Some teachers who use humour feel that type of activities should be changed according to children’s needs and condition while some ‘firm’ teachers view that giving children more drills in school might be a good solution.

Extremely, there were also teachers that felt that they still had to go through and finish the syllabus for whatever reason. Only a few teachers said that teaching through play is the best solution to matching curriculum to children’s needs.

4.3.3 Curriculum and Play

In exploring play element in pre-school curriculum, each teacher was asked two main questions. First, ‘**Is there any mention of play in the curriculum guidelines?**’ Second, ‘**Is there any guide on how to use play in teaching?**’. Responses from the 30 teachers are summarised in the Table 4.4 below:

Table 4.4
Teachers’ Responses on Play Element in Pre-school Curriculum

Q1: Mention	Q2: Guide	Teacher n=30
Yes	Yes	6
Yes	No	12
No	No	5
Don’t know/ not sure		6
Odd answer		1

From the above table, it is clear that there was a mention of play element in pre-school curriculum as acknowledged by 18 out of 30 teachers. However, the majority of teachers that said “yes” to the second question included in their answer phrases such “*Yes, but only a brief guide*” or “*yes, but the guide of how to use play is not elaborated in details*”.

A teacher from one private pre-school who was categorised into the first group stated that the word play in her pre-school curriculum was not used but play is there implicitly. She then continued her argument: *“Yes, everything come in like the word ‘play’. If the children come out and act and do role-play, how come you say, is there a guide...”*

A group of teachers that responded ‘yes’ to the first question and ‘no’ to the second question usually backed up their answers by stating one or two main points. First, ‘depends on teachers’ initiative and creativity’. What is meant by this phrase is that sometimes the implicit thing regarding LTP is written in the curriculum but it depends to the teacher to prepare the activity that suits LTP.

One university-based pre-school teacher who used to use play in teaching, in her explanation regarding play in the curriculum guidance has elaborated this point indirectly,

“ Actually the philosophy that we hold on it is learning through play but to deepen is through activity. From the activity we can see which means it depends to the teachers...even if we prepare and ready with the curriculum and activity, for example action words ‘lets run, lets walk’...all of them are play but how do the teacher teach the children. May be there are teachers who teach (this particular activity) using worksheet or just talk about it then writing on whiteboard...so, this lesson is not taught through play...!”

The second point referred to some similar statements such as ‘the guide was gained only through training’. One government-based pre-school teacher who has 24 years experience in working with young children discussed further this point of view, when she responded to the second question; whether there is any guide on how to use play in teaching.

“It depends to us, we see how. Means that they taught us how to use play, to make preparation during training courses. So, we can use play based on the guidelines given to us during practical teaching and so on...”.

The ‘odd answer’ in the above table, refers to one teacher who gave meaning to the word ‘play’ in the curriculum as ‘physical exercise’. Meanwhile, she perceived ‘the guide on how to use play’ as, ‘instruction in textbooks on how to teach or perform particular subject (topic) to children’. This teacher, from the beginning of her explanation regarding curriculum content and process stressed the phrase, *“we are definitely learning and not playing while learning”*.

4.3.4 Workbook and Homework Issues

As a general comment, many teachers used workbooks in their teaching either as follow-up activity, reinforcement, drilling purposes, school work to be brought home, assessment tool and even as a textbook that must laid on or referred to, every time they want to teach the children. In other words, the activities in the classroom are still approached mostly individually through scheme workbooks.

Throughout the interview only 2 out of 30 teachers did not use workbook as a tool of teaching young children. One of these two teachers, stressing firmly her principle and clarified,

“ We want the children to achieve our objectives but not through burden... My philosophy is that children not need to come to school bring heavy bag, then bring homework home. You learn, you achieve something at this stage without tiring in doing homework...lot of workbooks...because this is eventually is only one of the methods of teaching...”

Her view indeed is in contrast to those teachers who thought that giving more homework and drilling children a lot is the best solution for the conflict of matching curriculum to children's needs. Pertaining to this issue, one of them said, *"You have to be firm to the children and drill them with homework everyday...otherwise how could Malay children develop more further...?"*. Eventually, this teacher was among another more than two third of teachers who rely their teaching on workbooks whereby drills on workbooks become a medium or necessary activity in classroom practice. Meanwhile, one teacher that based her teaching on fun activity clarified that she used worksheets during teaching but only for reinforcement purposes while another teacher who also firmly held her teaching through play principle acknowledged that she too used workbooks in teaching but only as follow-up activity not as children's important duty.

Many teachers actually realised that workbooks are in fact not suitable for young children and even some of the teachers feel stressed to teach using too many workbooks. *"...Lots of works. Too much works they have to do. This is not fulfilling their needs. May be it suiting for primary school children..."*, complained one teacher from government-based pre-school. Her colleague from the same type of pre-school even condemned,

"...sometimes there a bit different between Ministry of Education curriculum and the textbooks provided by our department. So, we have to decide on our own...something that appropriate to our pre-school (children)..."

In other respects, some teachers relate homework tasks as parents' demands.

"...Sometimes they (parents) wanted their children to have homework. It usually likes that. Definitely they want school homework. As what I've learned during training course homework is not advisable. Sometimes there are parents who come to us and ask for homework..."

explained one teacher from a NGO pre-school who looked a bit depressed because of the situation. Another teacher from a religious-based pre-school also faced the same problem and she stated that sometimes parents keep complaining on the ‘empty contents’ of children’s workbooks.

Many teachers actually put the burden of workbook tasks as one of the main reason why they could not deploy play activity in classroom practice. Working on workbooks as the main learning activity in pre-school classroom indeed has caused stress not only for children but also for teachers. One teacher from a government pre-school was trying to work out her feeling and lamented,

“ We cannot finish the syllabus. Moreover, that’s lot of workbooks! Sometimes we didn’t even finish it. What we already planned we couldn’t implement it sometimes, because of overloaded workbooks. That’s why we don’t have time to play! Play in limited time! ”

Due to the pressure condition experienced by some teachers, that was no wonder why one of the teachers interviewed suggested that one of the ways play can be effectively incorporated into pre-school is by reducing the amount of scheme workbooks.

4.4 Teaching Style

4.4.1 Philosophy and Approaches

There are many interrelated aspects influencing teachers’ approaches in teaching young children. However, it is undeniable that teachers’ beliefs and philosophy underpin their teaching style. Regardless of setting, every teacher would have a different style of teaching and therefore it cannot be said that all teachers from the

same type of pre-school would have the same style of teaching. Some teachers preferred to teach in a formal way, some like humour or fun while some others like to combine or unify approaches in teaching.

Nevertheless, analysis of the responses revealed that basically there were three main styles of teaching approaches and timetable arrangement. Some settings based the curriculum offered by separating learning into subjects while some others favoured a topic or thematic approach, which provides a way of integrating the different subjects. There were also pre-schools that based their timetable arrangement on areas of development, the third type of teaching approach. Table 4.5 below summarises the distribution of teaching styles and approaches across pre-school settings. However categories of responses here are not evenly exclusive and many teachers mentioned more than one approach and one style.

Table 4.5
Examining Teachers’ Current Teaching Style Across Settings

	University-based n	State Religious Department n	MMYM (NGO) n	Unity Department (Govt-based) n	Private n	Total n
Subject-based	2	6	6	1	6	21
Thematic Approach	4	-	3	2	2	11
Areas of Development based	4	-	1	6	-	11
Fun Learning	5	3	4	6	2	20
Formal Teaching	1	3	2	2	6	14
Integrated Approach	3	2	3	-	1	9
Multiple Intelligent	-	-	-	-	2	2
Total Teachers (N)	6	6	6	6	6	30

With reference to Table 4.5, generally all teachers from State Religious Department, non-government settings and private settings mainly based their teaching on subject compartmented or separating learning into subjects which was fixed in the timetable.

One of the teachers who teaches based on subject and did not have any classroom assistant complained that this was a burden and she grumbled,

“One teacher has to teach all subjects! Teacher has to stay in the classroom from the first lesson till the end. Children are getting bored facing her all day...every subject...She cannot leave the classroom even for urgent reason; nobody is going to look after the children... Assistant teacher should be there in the classroom...”

The majority of teachers from university-based pre-schools favoured teaching through play and fun in classroom teaching, however; only four of them transmit the curriculum offered through thematic approach. Even though the other two referred to subject-based teaching, the situation is different whereby each subject is specific to one particular teacher, which means a specific teacher would teach only one particular subject and she is responsible to teach the subject to all pre-school classes in the setting.

All teachers from government pre-schools claimed that the children learn through fun and play activities and they apply a thematic approach when delivering the syllabus contents. Timetable arrangements, are based on particular areas of child development such as cognitive development, language development, aesthetic development etc. Fascinatingly, none of government pre-school teachers mentioned integrated learning although it is one of the approaches stated in the curriculum.

Meanwhile, two teachers from the same private setting were the only interviewees that highlighted multiple intelligences which was promoted by Gardner (1993), as one approach that underpinned their teaching style reference. However, they did not put LTP as a basis for developing children's creativity and the eight forms of intelligence.

Even though 20 out of 30 teachers appeared to teach based on fun and enjoyment activity, only 7 of them stated that learning or teaching through play is their philosophy or main principle in teaching young children. Many teachers throughout the explanation of their current teaching style and philosophy stated without intention what were the main focusing skills they wanted to develop further for pre-school children. Only 3 out of 30 teachers stated that they focused on overall and holistic development of children and one of them even stated clearly:

“ We are here, we want to develop overall children. Overall development. That is our specification. That’s why we specified all those components means that we are not giving them specification for reading, writing and counting. No! We don’t!”

Three teachers stated nothing about this issue while the remaining 24 teachers emphasised that they focus on developing either isolated reading, writing, counting or all 3R skills. One of the private school teachers who was very particular with writing skills stated,

“they follow out we write (sic). If we make the writing and all different, they will follow us. The beginning are insist where the date should be, where the day and every items must have the title and a numbering we say, the margin where the numbering goes near the margin...”

4.4.2 Grouping Children for Teaching and Learning Activity

Grouping of children either based on segregation, mixed ability or friendship arrangements is common in elementary school classroom. However, it is an interesting fact that in this study not all pre-school teachers put young children in groups either in terms of desks-chairs arrangement or classroom learning activity and for them, they gave reasons for not putting children into groups.

One teacher from a religious-based pre-school only put children in group for drawing activity and not for the other subjects, “...because for me children when they sit in group they tend to play too much. So they won’t concentrate to the lesson...” she explained the reason. Another teacher from a non government pre-school also did the same thing but for another reason in different context,

“ We are not segregating children; slow...advance... Putting children into group would create behaviour problem...slow child would keep on crying while advance child would perform aggressive behaviour.... We mix them... (in one whole class)”

Generally, the teachers that put play as ‘play in passing’ or ‘playing while learning’ run a play as a whole class activity rather than for groups. They perceived instructional learning materials such as flash cards as sort of play materials whereby academic play occurred. For example, a teacher from a non-government pre-school explained indirectly how she conducts play as whole class activity through the explanation of her teaching style,

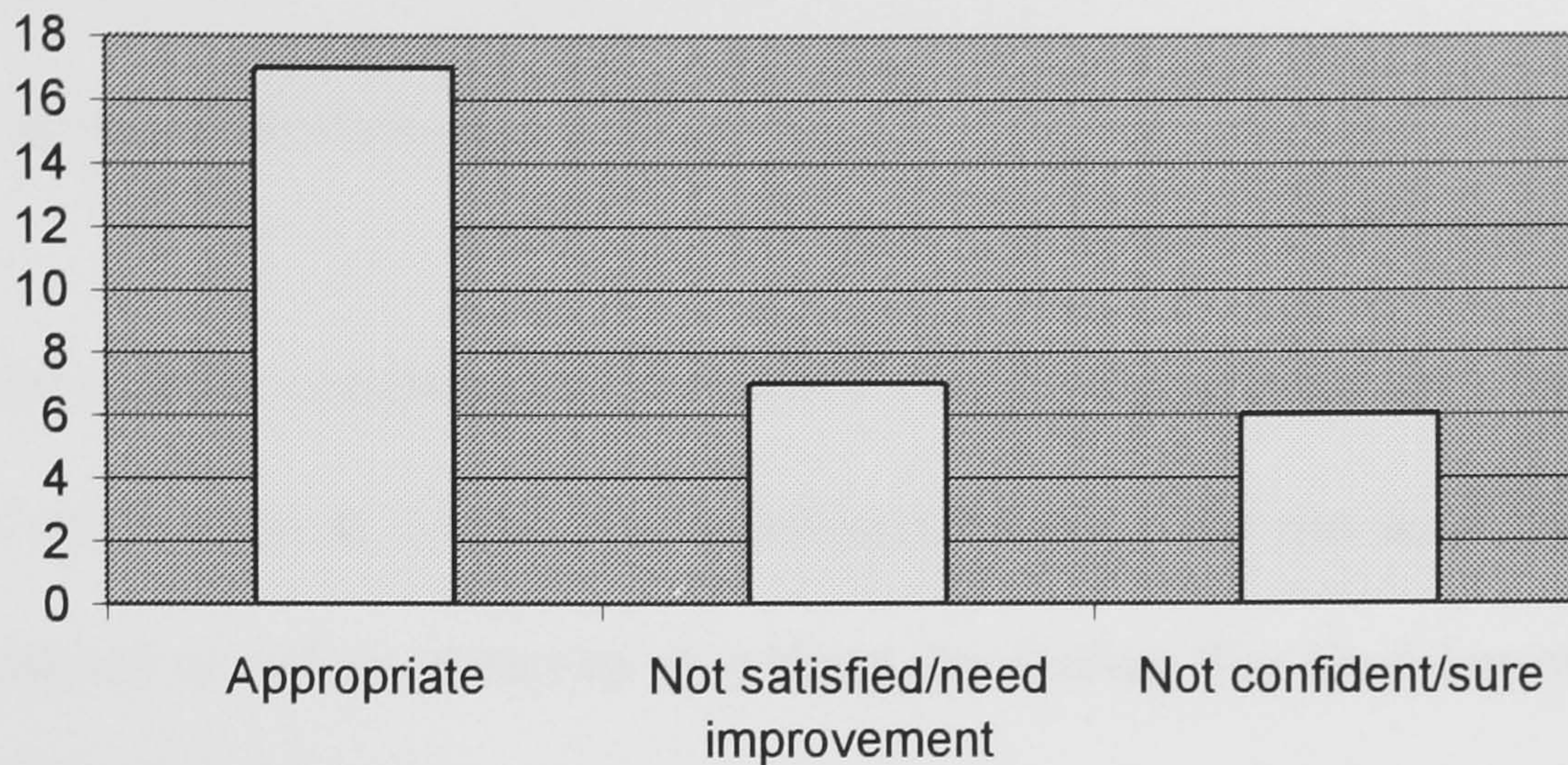
“For example when we introduce them letter “A”, we’ll sing £Abu Ada Ayam ah ah ah...£ (Abu has chicken). At the same time we show them card “A” to the children, so they know “A” figure at the same time we pronounce A. So, through that, children will focus and concentrate upon the card and they get what we teach them on that day...”

4.4.3 Appropriateness of Teaching Style

When the teachers were asked to give reasons for how they feel about the appropriateness of current teaching style and organisation for children learning, the responses actually have a significant relationship with their belief and philosophy of learning. In general, the responses could be divided into 3 main categories (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4

Responses on Appropriateness of Current Teaching Style



The figure shows that 17 out of 30 teachers felt that their teaching style was appropriate for organisation of children’s learning. However only four of them confidently stated that the reason for the appropriateness was because they teach through play. Another 13 teachers from this category also stated that their teaching style was appropriate but with another reason that reflected their own belief and principle. For example, one of these teachers replied that she felt that her teaching style was appropriate because she is satisfied when children labelled her as ‘firm teacher’ while, at the same time, parents are also satisfied with this style.

The second category of responses referred to a situation whereby teachers feel that their teaching style is not appropriate. Mainly, they mentioned one of two reasons; either because of insufficient management of their setting or because they themselves feel that they need improvement for their teaching style. The third group seemed

confused about this issue. They said it as appropriate but at the same time they raised problems of suiting their teaching style to the organisation of children's learning

4.5 Resolution

4.5.1 Teachers' Knowledge on Play

When interviewing teachers on the subject of their knowledge on play, they were asked an open question; taking into consideration that I did not want the teachers to feel threatened or ashamed nor to give them the feeling that their knowledge might be considered unsatisfactory. The open questions used for this purpose were 1) **How/what do you think children learn through play.** 2) **How did you justify child's play to parents' objectivity?**

Responses to the first question revealed that teachers' thoughts of play were related to achieving academic potential, stressing on 3R competence. About 14 out of 30 teachers described how children learn through play by stating examples of how children achieve academic potential through academic play activity. Some teachers mentioned how children learn social and emotional skills through play but at the end, they related it back to academic outcomes. It was rare to get a response that through play children get input for their overall development or through play children explore the physical world and expand their level of thinking.

Meanwhile, teachers' arguments regarding their justification to parents' objectivity merely related to their view that the necessity of play is basically to avoid children from getting bored and release the tension and stress of learning. The content of their

argument was also almost the same whether they view play as very important or a waste of time. Therefore, a typical statement in justifying parents' objectivity as stated by 14 out of 30 teachers is; "*not playing all day, divide time between play and learning*" or "*children will feel bored if they keep on learning*" or "*to attract children's interest and attention to learn*".

There were also some teachers who related their justification to academic achievement and informed parents their children were involved only in academic play in school while some teachers said that they never received any complaints from parents due to not teaching through play or having no involvement from parents. In some cases there were also teachers who even stated straightforwardly, "*I don't know how to answer them*" or "*difficult to say...let them say what they want to say...*"; statements that may reveal that they didn't see the necessity of play in children's learning.

Through the questions on teachers' teaching experience and qualification too, information regarding teachers' knowledge on play were developed further especially when the teachers explained indirectly the contents and contexts of training courses they have been attended. As stated earlier in the previous section on respondents' background, only 3 out of 30 teachers interviewed had a degree as their basic qualification. All these teachers were from university-based pre-schools. Two teachers from private pre-school have Diploma in Montessori and one teacher is just waiting for her MCE result while the rest of 23 teachers are MCE or O level holders. There is one teacher from government-based pre-school who has only LCE as her basic qualification, however, she has been teaching for 24 years and has attended

different kind of Pre-school Teachers' Training courses and Certificates and according to her she had attended special courses for LTP.

Nevertheless, only 13 of 23 O level holder teachers have attended a special training course to obtain a pre-school teacher certificate organised by various agencies like Unity Department, University Science Malaysia, Malaysian Pre-school Association and others. Regardless of type of settings, only 5 of these teachers stated they had learned something briefly about LTP through the courses attended. The rest of them, when they were asked about content of the training course stated that there was no mention of LTP.

One teacher from a religious-based pre-school for example, had 8 years experience in teaching pre-school children and had attended various type of training and courses but claimed that information regarding children's play was only mentioned briefly in one of the courses. Interview with another teacher from NGO type of pre-school showed that she also shared the same view,

"... We also have training how to improve our teaching style...but there is no particular course on LTP. The only that we have is how to tackle or manage children then discussion if any problem raised up..."

4.5.2 The Parents' Perception on Play in the Eyes of the Teachers

" Sometimes parents said that their children going to school only to play, but they didn't know the play concept..."

" Parents are very concerned if we let their children play too much..."

" Does my child play in school?"

The above quotations referred to typical expressions articulated by the majority of teachers indirectly regarding their feelings or what they see in terms of parents' perception on play in classroom teaching.

Indeed, no direct question regarding parents' perceptions towards play were asked to the teachers. However, no matter what question they were discussing, whether play in curriculum, play as teaching style, problems, philosophy; many teachers kept on referring to parents' preference of pre-school activity. Parental involvement in their children's education and their preference on academic achievement sometimes leads to parental pressure as described by some teachers.

During the interview sessions, many teachers seemed to work out their feeling regarding parents' perceptions towards play and there is an element of pressure faced by some teachers to the extent that one stated that she is afraid of parents, *"for me as a teacher, surely learning is through play but parents... I'm afraid of parents... their perception is different! They think is just play..."* Another teacher from the same type of pre-school has the same feeling and she stated, *"...Indeed, I won't allocate play activity when parents are in the classroom. I won't show them! Otherwise they think that children 'just' play with no purpose..."*

In discussing this point of view, one teacher from university-based pre-school even blamed and stated forthrightly that the phenomenon that happens is due to parents' misunderstanding towards children's early learning, *"...Sometimes they are too excited. They want their children can read in a short period of time. Come to Kindergarten and can read purposely...."* She lamented.

Parents’ attitude and objection towards play in pre-school classrooms can even become the main problem of not deploying play in classroom practice. This fact was actually stated by 23 out of 30 teachers. “ *The problem is parents. Parents who said that their children are not learning, they are only playing*” stated one of these teachers.

4.5.3 Constraints and Problem in Deploying Play

Table 4.6 below shows the main problems and constraints faced by teachers in deploying play in classroom practice.

Table 4.6
Constraints and Problems in Deploying Play

Problems and Constraints	Teachers n=30
Parents’ Attitude/ Objection	23
Teachers Knowledge/Attitude	18
Time factor/overloaded syllabus	16
Management of Children	9
Insufficient materials/resources	13
Pre-school prospectus	4
Others	7

Table 4.6 reveals that in general, problems of deploying play in pre-school classrooms as stated by teachers interviewed could be summarised into 7 main categories:

1) **Parents' Attitude/ Objectivity:**

As mentioned earlier, many teachers stated that they did not deploy play in classroom practice because play opposes the needs of parents, which for them is the main problem. Pertaining to this issue, one teacher from a university-based pre-school did not apply this to all parents and she specified them by stating,

“If we conduct play in the environment whereby parents’ level of thinking like academic level is quite high, they can easily understand what is learning. But may be if we implement in the class out of this environment (low level); even if we explain, I guess they can accept but not that far...”

Some teachers even clarified and shared their experiences on how have they tried to deal with parents regarding this issue and tried to explain the scenario; unfortunately, the feedback from parents was still negative.

2) **Teachers' Knowledge/ Attitude**

The second factor reflected to teachers themselves and their attitudes towards play. Three teachers stated that they were not interested in deploying play and preferred to teach in a formal way. One of government pre-school teachers who was acknowledged by the government department as a ‘teacher at professional level’ complained about other pre-school teachers’ attitudes towards play and she mourned, *“Teachers did not understand and not interested to implement play. Some teachers don’t know but they said they know!”*.

In some situations, the teachers interviewed acknowledged they themselves as ‘lacking of knowledge’ and were eager to have further training for the purpose of

implementing play. *“Ump...cannot...suppose to learn more. Play could be implemented, but we need to learn more...”* said one teacher.

3) **Time factor:**

Generally, the time factor reason referred to an ‘overloaded’ syllabus problem. The teachers that raised this issue usually blamed overloaded syllabus as a factor why they couldn’t implement play in classroom teaching. One teacher from a religious-based pre-school said,

“Yes, we don’t have time. More less (time) rather than enough. Not enough time because we have overloaded syllabus. So many we have to teach them...they learn and do not have chance to learn more, then time to go home...”

In another context, there were also teachers that raised the issue of the time factor whereby they felt that play is just wasting the time and play sort of ‘steals’ the time to learn because, according to them, studying through play takes more time. In other words, some teachers put preference to teach and let children learn properly using workbooks in order to finish the syllabus rather than put play as main activity to learn.

4) **Management of Children**

This problem referred to a situation whereby teachers feel that they could not implement play because play caused more discipline problems; more noise, a lot of talking, a lot of movement, fighting etc. Some teachers described play as causing attitude problems among children such as dawdling on play, *“They use to play...they*

keep on playing even during learning time”, said one of these teachers. *“They think they can play every time....”* added another teacher.

Additionally, one teacher from a government pre-school raised the issue of children’s attitude regarding this matter. According to her, some children were being ‘moulded’ by their parents that learning is when teachers write down something on a whiteboard, they follow instruction and then do their work in workbooks. Therefore, these brilliant children sometimes asked why are they playing and when are they going to learn even though they were actually learned through play.

5) **Insufficient materials/resources**

Lack of play materials and resources and even unavailable play equipment was also frequently mentioned, *“Sometimes what we want to do, we have to think on our own, we have to find our own materials...”* said one teacher. Another teacher also complained about the resources but in terms of insufficient space to play while another teacher relate this problem to budget expenditure, *“we need play equipment. Good, long lasting play equipment...in terms of budget...”*.

6) **Pre-school Prospectus**

Only 4 out of 30 teachers mentioned this problem. According to them, play is either not suitable to their pre-school prospectus or the curriculum that their pre-school is based on put more emphasis on another area of specialization and therefore time to

play was very limited. These teachers were from religious-based pre-school, NGO pre-school and private pre-school.

7) **Others**

The odd problems mentioned by teachers are categorised as ‘others’ included society view’s on play, complaints from primary school teachers etc and actually, the mainly issue is related to pre-school management and administration problem such as “*did not receive proper attention from management site*” etc.

4.5.4 **Effective Play**

As an ending to the interview sessions, teachers were asked to give some suggestion on ways of how play can be effectively incorporated into pre-school teachers’ daily teaching. One teacher stated straightforwardly that in her opinion play could not be incorporated into pre-school daily teaching due to the time factor.

Many teachers proposed the following requirements for play to be used effectively in classroom practice:

1. The most frequent suggestion was to add more resources for play materials and equipment, and get all facilities for variety play types and corners
2. Considerable attention and understanding from top management regarding the importance and necessity of children’s play, so there would be more support in terms of budgets

More opportunities to attend training course, and play implementation should be monitored by experts

3. Reduced use of textbooks and preference for teachers' made worksheets
4. Considerable understanding from parents and society regarding play values and this could be developed through workshops or explaining sessions
5. Teachers themselves need to change their attitude; develop understanding about the LTP concept, which can increase their interest and willingness to implement play activities in classroom practice.

4.6 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter presented the analysis of teachers' responses in relation to their understanding of the concept of play in child development and education. Their views were analysed based on five major themes; meaning and concept of play, play allocation, curriculum aspect, teaching style and resolution. In this chapter, factors that contributed to the impediment of play progress were also addressed.

In summary, findings from teachers' responses revealed that many early years teachers in the present Malaysian sample are unable to articulate exactly what a child is gaining from a play activity in classroom teaching and learning climates. There was a mark discrepancy in their understanding between play contribution to child development and play in relation to educational development of the children in classroom practice. Besides, teachers rarely incorporated play into their plans nor did they promote play as the foundation for learning, even though some of them provided materials and time to play.

CHAPTER 5:

ANALYSIS OF PARENTS' AND CHILDREN'S RESPONSES

5.0 Introduction

Parents are important people. They are the child's first educator and direct the children's first learning opportunities. Therefore parents play important roles in determining educational experience for their children. There was evidence indicating that many pre-school educators are resisting the push by parents towards increasingly formal and academic pre-school education. The teachers and administrators interviewed in this study also highlighted the same issue and they stated that parents did not favour play as an activity that linked to the children's learning. Perhaps the results from parents' interviews in this study could explore and describe the actual situation.

From the total of 30 interviews with open-ended questions, only 6 were conducted in English and therefore the other 24 were transcribed and translated into English. Then, all the 30 transcriptions were analysed using the same method that was used in analysing teacher's responses. Meanwhile, 12 children were interviewed in an informal situation and the data resulting were also analysed. No attempt had been made to investigate in terms of gender differences. Each interview, which contained only 4 main questions, lasted about 10 to 15 minutes.

5.1 Analysis of Parents' Responses

In order to simplify the process of analysing the data, the translated transcription of parents' responses were summarised onto a 'special form' and analysed according to several relevant topics. Under each subdivided topic, the data were discussed by comparing differences and similarities among parents' views on particular issues (see example: **Appendix K**).

5.1.1 Parents' Understanding of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education usually refers to any program designed for children from birth to the age of statutory schooling. The educational process for them could take place either only at home, or partly at home and partly in school. The first education at home frequently considered as learning the skills of life while the other part of education that might take place in school is often considered as a continuation of that first education.

However parents in this study generally referred to early childhood education as any specifically educational program prior to their entrance into first year in primary schooling. They seemed to ignore the context of early education before the pre-school age and the whole informal educational process from when the children were born until primary school age. One parent of 6 years old child stated,

“ From what I understood, early education means to educate our children to be prepared before entering preparatory schooling. Means that they are ready enough in terms of mind, thinking and social aspects before they entered formal school. They are well-prepared to receive academic lessons”

Besides, there were some parents that described early childhood education as something formal, rigid to something that sounds academic and they defined early childhood education as certain academic skills that were supposed to be learned or acquired by the children prior to statutory schooling. One parent from a religious-based pre-school stated: *“usually when we send our children to school during their early stage, we want our children to recognise letters, numbers....”*. Another parent from a non-government pre-school had the same view, *“ for me, early education is the education after education at home ... in school we teach them reading, writing, counting and all that...”*

Throughout the interviews, only 6 out of 30 parents viewed early childhood education as an education that begins from the house, not academic learning, more towards informal education and acquiring daily life skills. One parent who obviously throughout the interview session opposed the pressure on academic learning towards young children explained,

“I think basically at the early age what you need to teach is basic...it is just everyday things...it's not really academic just learning how to cope with everyday living like going to the bathroom, tying your shoes, feeding yourself and then make friends, have fun...it is important (but) sending to school is an option. You can have the same thing at home if there is somebody at home...”

Another parent, from a university-based pre-school shared the same view,

“(It's) education at home...not formal...so, means that how much parents allow the children to participate in their daily life...their daily life either as what I did...for example, cooking. How you communicate with them, ok, you bring them shopping also you educated them; whatever they see I'll explain. I'll try to explain because they'll ask you a lot of questions...”

In other respects, some parents put early childhood education as a place whereby the children could develop their socio-emotional skills prior to statutory schooling. One mother in this situation has her own view;

“ early education is the time whereby we inculcate the children with religious belief and faith because they could be influenced by morally wrong stuff if they grow up without basic religious knowledge...”

5.1.2 Purposes of Sending Children to Pre-school

In general, parents’ purposes of sending their children to pre-school were stated implicitly when they were describing what they understood by early childhood education. Therefore, when the exact question of what they saw as the purpose of pre-school education was asked, some parents repeated what they had said in their first response on the concept of early childhood education.

An overriding theme provided by many of the responses was the issue of preparing children for standard one, be it academically, socially or emotionally and even personal reason. From the interviews, 13 out of 30 parents put emphasis on developing socio-emotional skills, and they considered it as the main skill supposed to be acquired by their children before entering the actual school. A self-employed father who sent his son to a religious-based pre-school lamented:

“ ...Here, there are lessons, socialisation. Even though he is still small and could not receive lesson properly, but the most important is his socialisation. Like in this school, he used to play with friends...that’s the priority,”

Another parent, who sent her daughter to a government-based pre-school also had the same view,

“Umm...actually, my purpose is to let her mix around, to let her know something about school environment. Not too...could communicate, play with friends, talking to teachers...”

In some cases, parents did mention the importance of social and emotional skill as preparation for statutory schooling, but the main purpose of sending their children to pre-school seems to be more concerned with their children's academic achievement. For example, one parent from a non-government pre-school stated at the beginning that when she sent her child to pre-school, her child was not afraid to socialise and mix with others but then she stated: *“...She would be getting the education earlier. Means that she can read earlier, can count and all that. Complete all the lessons before entering year 1”*. Meanwhile, another parent from a private pre-school also presented upon the same notion,

“Umm...other than what I have mentioned just now (the exposure of discipline, getting to know friends, friendship...), another thing is to make sure that they can read and that before they go to the primary school”.

Overall, 12 out of 30 parents appeared to focus on academic skills they wished the child to have, as revealed by comments such as:

“...send children to school is for learning, letter recognition and all that...I don't want my child to be left behind like other children when they come to formal school...If we didn't send her to pre-school she might be a slow learner...”.

In another comment, a secondary school teacher parent stated clearly her wishes regarding her children's academic performance, *“My purpose is that he can read, he can count before entering primary school...poor him if he would be left behind while most of his friends already know how to read...”*

Among this group of parents, some of them stated that the reason of sending children to pre-school was because either they worked and did not have time to teach children

at home, or they were housewives but they didn't know how to teach their children academic learning skills.

The issue of comparing care and education for their pre-school children was raised up by 2 parents as a reason of why they preferred to send their children to pre-school rather than childminders. In relation to play in pre-school, one of the parents interviewed stated unintentionally one interesting opinion whereby he pointed out that the purpose of sending his child to pre-school was to reduce her play and focus more on learning!

5.1.3 Choosing Pre-school and Expectation

This study also asked parents their reasons for sending children to particular types of pre-school setting, wondering whether one of them may say 'because this pre-school is teaching children through play'. However, parents gave no such answer except what was stated by a parent from a government-based pre-school: “ *...and I think here is ok in terms of the way of teaching; they have learning, play, sport and all that*”. Nevertheless the first priority according to this parent was because the school is near to her house and has minimum fees, not because of the allocation of play in classroom practices.

'Nearness to home' was the first reason given by 19 out of 30 parents. Accessibility or practical issues such as located near where they live or work, lower cost, opening hours etc., therefore, were the first and foremost factors that parents considered when

selecting a setting. The next reasons varied according to type of pre-school. Table 5.1 below illustrates key considerations preferred by parents in choosing pre-school for their children.

Table 5.1:
Why did you send your child into this particular type of pre-school?

Reasons	Parents n = 30
Accessibility/ Practical Issues	19
Pre-school prospectus/ Philosophy	14
Reputation	9
Academic Success	9
Children’s happiness/choice	2
Personal reason	9

The pre-school prospectus as listed in the above table generally referred to a situation whereby the pre-schools involved based their curriculum or philosophy of teaching on inculcation of Islamic moral values and the emphasising of Islamic Education which for them could mould their children’s behaviour and personality. Even though some of these pre-schools were not religious-based, the Islamic concept of education underpinned their prospectus.

The happiness of the children in the pre-school or the children’s choice was mentioned by only two parents and hence appears not to be an important consideration. In other words, for some parents reputation of the school and the academic success appeared to be more important rather than children’s satisfaction. One of the parents interviewed indirectly proposed her view regarding this issue,

“ ...my husband wanted this pre-school and based on what his friends said, this particular pre-school is ok, better. It sort of...there is not much play. The time

provided focus more on learning rather than play. It also provides play activity from the type of physical exercises, sports...”

When they were asked what they expected from their children's pre-school, children's academic competence and performance were the main expectation reported by 19 out of 30 parents. These parents seem to prize academic progress very highly and seek it even for their young children. “ *I want him to be active in school, practise more on reading...that one is important. I hope this pre-school would be the same standard as private school...the prestige...*” said a mother of a 6 years old child who frequently compared him and his older brother in terms of their potential and academic achievement.

However among these 19 parents there were also some that put into consideration their children's personal social skills besides academic learning. One parent who was a university administrative staff stated that his expectation was: “*...they already know how to write and read, how to socialise, their moral and all that...well prepared to enter Y1 primary school.*” Another parent who put emphasis on academic learning also did not deny the necessity of children's moral development. She uttered:

“ By the time she finished her pre-school period, she would get both, academic learning whereby she can read, recognise all letters; besides ...she would become a good Muslim child having a good Muslim personality and she would also be good in academic learning...”

Throughout the interviews only 4 out of 30 parents put the socio-emotional and moral development of the children as their main expectation from the pre-school while academic learning was considered as a secondary element to be developed. One parent who was educated to doctorate level explained:

“ The first, my daughter...getting familiar...she knows that she is going to school and she is aware of the routine. She has to wake up early...brush teeth...and she knows what she has to do, ok...Academic is after that...last. First, to make her like to go to school”

Another parent who worked as a Hotel House Keeper had the same view;

“I hope from her teachers, I expected not in terms of her lessons, but in terms of her courage to enter Y1 primary school...then her brain’s agility.”

5.1.4 Awareness of Pre-school Curriculum and Teaching Learning Activities

Discussion with parents regarding the pre-school curriculum to which their children were exposed revealed that very few parents felt that they knew the curriculum contents well. The usual and the utmost answers responded by parents were: *“I know what my children learned or did in school only through their workbooks or homework”*. One parent, a teacher at one of the religious-based pre-schools, suggested that this was a common experience for parents, *“ Parents don’t get much information ...They know what their children have learned only through the workbooks brought home by the children...”* She then clarified that she has a good knowledge about the preschool curriculum just because it happens that she is a teacher in that pre-school.

There were also some parents who stated that they only get information regarding the pre-school curriculum through a briefing session during the registration day. *“I know about the syllabus only during the registration day, I’ve seen it but I forgot about it!”* lamented one parent from a government-based pre-school. Some of them even stated

that they didn't know or never asked about the curriculum. One parent from a non-government pre-school is one of these parents. However from the way she answered the question it seems that she was not satisfied with her condition, “ *No, no... (Curriculum) teacher didn't tell parents. I also never have seen his books. The school gave it to us only at the end of the year....*”

Some parents were not aware of the contents of the pre-school curriculum because they felt that reading its content is not necessary and it is enough only to have a look into the children's classroom timetable. Pre-school curriculum according to them is something easy, common things and only related to learning basic things such as letters recognition, reading simple words, simple mathematics and other basic academic skills.

Throughout the interviews, only 6 out of 30 parents could be categorised as 'aware' of the content of their child's pre-school curriculum. One parent from a private pre-school stated:

“The syllabus...I think it's good, most of the children...they focus more on general knowledge. Suppose they are teaching all these... They are teaching like...overall, you know. I think it's good...the environment”

Meanwhile, another parent from a government pre-school complained about the curriculum content,

“ I think the curriculum is quite heavy. High level! Something that we learned about it when we were 8 or 9 years old at the previous time, and they have to learn it in pre-school today!”

In gaining information regarding parents' awareness of teaching and learning activity, almost all parents admitted that they keep on asking their children what they

learned in school everyday. But they seem to focus on the content of learning rather than the context of how children learned or how they were being taught. One parent, for example stated:

“ Yes, I asked him, what the teacher taught today? He said for example he used this book. He opened the book and showed it to me. His teacher might have ticked something in the book whether he did it correct or wrong”.

When they were asked to explain or describe the method of how the school educated their child, 6 out of 30 parents frankly stated that they didn't know or didn't realise what's going on in the pre-school classroom. *“I have never seen how the teachers are teaching them...but the teacher would inform us if the child could not read or a bit lazy...”* said one of these 6 parents. Other statements from the remaining 5 parents also revealed that child progress and the outcomes were their priority rather than the process of learning.

Overall, 24 out of 30 parents could explain clearly the method whereby the teacher educated their children and among these parents; only 7 of them mentioned the element of play used by teachers in teaching their children. However, the play used was from the type of academic play which could develop their academic learning skills such as 'counting and learning English through song', 'say sound through play then reading' etc.

Many of the parents reported that the teacher taught their children based on a syllabus, formal way of teaching and focused more on academic competence, and they were quite satisfied with this style as long as the teacher managed to handle and not be too firm to children.

5.1.5 Consciousness of Play Element in Pre-school Learning Programme

Parents in this study were also asked to describe play-based activities provided in their children's setting either indoors or outdoors in order to obtain a general description of whether they were included the play element in children's learning. Five out of 30 parents stated that they didn't know or were not sure about play-based activities organised for children's learning.

One of the parents interviewed, even perceived 'play' in the classroom as something that related to disruptive behaviour,

"I'm not sure what she played. She play like looking at her friend doing their work, they run to the door ... I think there is play opportunity but when the teacher asked her to do her work she would be disciplined, focusing on her worksheet..."

Whilst, another parent who had nearly the same view felt that play is something that has less importance when talking about pre-school learning activities,

"Less...but that one is not that important because children need to be put under controlled. It's difficult if they play without being controlled. So, limited. Definitely limited... They have physical exercise ...(but) play is not a big deal!"

Normally, 12 out of 30 parents were aware of a play element in their children's learning programme. However the play as mentioned by them referred only to "sport" or "physical exercise". In other words, play as illustrated in their minds seems to be something that is outside of learning lessons and was generally named as physical play or outdoor play.

" Play...ha, that's the problem! Actually, the villagers, they were the people who established this pre-school. So, the space is so limited. The basement given by the City Council is small and narrow. As you can see, there is no place for children to play except the front yard, the car park. This is the only that we could afford..."

said one parent from a government pre-school, showing his concern .

A play element in classroom learning appeared to be ignored by many parents and throughout the interviews only a few parents showed their great consciousness towards both indoors and outdoors play-based activities in their children's pre-school whereby they considered it as one of the most important elements in children's learning.

One parent from a university-based pre-school confidently stated, *“Actually play is their concept. They inculcated the concept overall in the programme...sometimes we thought that they did a wrong task, which actually was the right one...”*. From his explanation, it could be understood that the teachers from this pre-school had educated the parents to understand the play concept used in the setting. Another parent from a private pre-school, also gave a clear description regarding play-based activity provided in her child's pre-school, however, the play facilities mentioned were not used as an approach in classroom teaching. Instead, it was used for after school activity or during break and play time.

5.1.6 Perceptions and Knowledge on Children's Play

Parents in this study elaborated their views and perceptions about play through the question **what did you understand by the word 'play' in children's world?** The significance, concept, value and purpose of play is shown in their responses.

“ Play for me is a natural tendency for children...something necessary for them. That's their life. Life to play...”

“ Play is doing something that they enjoyed...they can learn something during play”

“Play is something must in children’s world... play with friends, play with things...

It’s good for health and better for their brain and mind development”

“ ...It can be academic, slightly but as long as it is not too rigid...you know, it should be flexible, should be fun...”

Generally, all parents perceived play as something fun, natural, that plays important roles in children’s lives, contributes to child development and has an educational value. Table 5.2 illustrates parents’ images of play and represents the responses of 30 parents.

Table 5.2
Parents’ Images of Play

Play Images	Parents’ Responses N=30
Fun/Enjoyment	14
Educational	9
Social interaction	5
Recreational	3
Natural tendency	6
Contribution to development	11
Exercise/Health	3

Table 5.2 above illustrates that parents acknowledge the necessity of play in children’s lives and they were concerned about the contribution of play to child development and the educational aspects of play. Even though the social aspect of play was only mentioned by 5 out of 30 parents, “playing with friends” were the typical terms known by all parents. This term actually leads to a situation whereby some parents perceived play as recreational, *“Play means that they have enough time to have enough leisure time to play with their friends and then, they enjoy themselves”*, explained an administrative staff parent in a university.

Another parent, who also saw social aspects in play, however, perceived play as ‘disruptive behaviour’ in classroom learning,

“Children play a lot...sometimes they wake up, run from this side to another, then talk to friends, then walk around, intervene other children, disturbing friends beside him...that is not good because that is time for learning!”.

When parents were asked how children learn through play, the majority of their responses revealed that they know well how the process of learning developed through play and they gave some convenient examples. But, when they were prompted further to explain how play develops children’s intelligence, the context of their responses changed spontaneously. For example one parent confidently gave details on an example of how children learn through play,

“ learning through work...a balloon has no air, so he is supposed to do a bit work to fill in the air. So, how should he fill in the air, with what, what should he do, what should he take ...that’s how he learned”.

Then when the follow up question was asked, she said, *“for that one, I don’t know what to say...”*

Three parents frankly stated they didn’t know how could play contributed to the development of intelligence, some stated play is not appropriate and one parent even denied the contribution of play to children’s intelligence. Some parents, on the other hand, associated intelligence with children’s ability and natural potential not something that could develop through play.

In explaining the differences between play at home and play in school, many parents described play at home as ‘unlimited’, ‘more freedom’, ‘unstructured’ and nothing to do with learning academic skills except what was labelled as ‘games’. Whilst play in school for them was ‘strict on particular type of play materials’, ‘in limited time’ and

labelled as ‘clean’ type of play, not the messy one. In reviewing this issue, one parent, a university lecturer, commented,

“The difference is, in school, because the objective is academic or education, so the channel is education. The method...the aim... is going towards educational aim...but at home, the play is not...especially the parents that didn’t see that play is one of the methods to educate children. So the play (at home) is not going towards that...(education)....”

5.1.7 Perception Towards Play and Learning

There was no specific question asked of parents regarding the relationship between play and learning. Nevertheless parents sometimes mentioned indirectly the interrelationship between these elements throughout the interview. For example, in defining play, one parent stated indirectly that children are free to play if they have finished their classroom lessons and, at home, they are allowed to play after finishing their school work or if they have leisure time. In other words, time to play is supposed to be separated from time to learn, play is one thing and learning is something else.

In fact, about a third of parents shared the same view as the parent mentioned before and 9 out of 30 parents considered that play could not develop their children’s academic achievement. For them play lead to thoughtlessness and could cause academic failure or going down. *“No...no...if dawdling on play, how could she learn or study?”* asked one parent while another 8 parents put a condition, *“depends to what type of play”*, they said. This means that there are particular types of play relevant to improving academic achievement and they refused any other type of play other than academic or educational play. *“It depends ...I divided play into two. If*

they play just like...I mean not using their mind ... more on physical sports, so basically may be it does help contribute to physical health but not improving their concentration and all that..." said a medical doctor parent.

Many parents acknowledged that they spent some time playing with their children or watching their children playing either at home or in the playground. They saw it as to strengthening relationships between parents and children or to let their children enjoy themselves. When they were asked, **are you aware that your children learn something when you play with them**, some of them admitted this was so. They said that even if their children didn't learn something academic, at least they would be learning something else. *"We play with children, at the same time we teach them..."*

But some of them replied, *"if she play, just play and that's her work. She doesn't want to study if play..."*. Another parent, frankly recognized, *"Sometimes I didn't realise about that and I feel that play is only for enjoyment..."*

5.1.8 Attitudes Toward Play in Pre-school

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 4, 23 out of 30 teachers raised the issue of parents' attitude towards play in pre-school and they claimed that parents' objections towards play activity in pre-school was one of the main problems in deploying play in classroom practice. In researching this point of view parents were asked to give their opinion regarding the appropriateness of play in pre-school classroom teaching, and their preference for increasing or reducing play activities in the pre-school setting.

Apparently, 25 out of 30 parents accepted play as a good element in teaching young children and viewed it as ‘ok’, ‘appropriate’, ‘relevant’ and ‘suitable’ to be used in pre-school practice. However many of them came out with several strict conditions if play is to be implemented in the setting. First, the older the children, the lesser the play. In other words play according to some parents was suitable only for younger children but not at the age of 6 which for them is ‘a preparation year for statutory schooling’. One parent from a private pre-school explained,

“For me 5 and 6 years old definitely they still have to play... but it should be lesser compared to younger age because at this time, for me they should be able to really prepared themselves in order to go to primary school... minimally, they should be able to read and to count, to do simple mathematics...”

The second condition was that play activity must be from the type of academic play or educational games not other type of play. According to some parents, academic play is the only play that could develop children’s mind and benefit them. One mother argued,

“If play like counting or play ABC, number and spelling...it doesn’t matter...that one testing children’s mind...I’m not agree if play like sand, water...because they can play those stuff at home. Come to school to learn!”

‘Structured plays, not free play’ and ‘under teachers control’ were other conditions if play is to be implemented in pre-school practice. Besides, some parents also put emphasis on statements such as, *“play in limited time”* or *“learning some times and play another time separately as a rest and avoidance from getting bored”*. One father, in this situation stated, *“play is play but not the whole time and not using play method the whole day...”* and in another discussion he insisted, *“...if we increase it (play) children are not able to learn the syllabus in the curriculum”*

When the parents were questioned whether play activity was supposed to be increased or reduced, only 5 out of 30 parents thought that pre-school should increase play activities for children. Many parents argued that children have to concentrate on their academic learning first rather than play. In other words, they actually didn't deny children's right to play but the play activities should be reduced, "*Hopefully we could reduce play; give them more work and serious learning*" said one parent who is a pre-school teacher. Some parents, on the other hand, have an opinion of "balance" between play and learning. "*...Better to be the same amount of play and learning time...alternate between academic learning and playing, but not to keep only on playing*" explained a house-wife from a government based pre-school.

5.1.9 Preference of Pre-school Activity

Many teachers throughout their interviews claimed that parents preferred academic-based activity to be experienced by their pre-school children and refused play as the main approach in teaching. In examining this scenario, parents were asked to give their opinion if all elements of pre-school curriculum would be covered through play. Only 5 out of 30 parents fully agreed with the suggestion and these parents believed that play should be the approach and they perceived that pre-school is at the stage whereby teachers should be teaching their children the process of learning and not the actual learning, so, everything was supposed to be fun for children.

At the same time, 9 parents accepted the suggestion of covering all elements of pre-school curriculum with play but, again, with certain conditions such as, not for all subjects, only if structured academic play and only for under 6 years old children.

The remaining 16 parents did not agree with the suggestions, *“If all were play, he would not know how to write, would be in trouble when going to primary school...reading is must!”* lamented one parent from a government-based pre-school. Sharing the same view, one parent from a religious-based pre-school stated, *“ No, she would used to play and keep on wanting to play...play is distinguished from learning. Not to mix them except if the play is the lesson itself. Half time play and other half for learning.”* Other parents’ quotations from non-government and private pre-school also revealed the same notion that they didn’t agree if play underpinned the pre-school curriculum.

5.2 Children’s Responses

The main point in conducting the interviews with the 12 children was to obtain direct impressions what children thought about their pre-school and the activities that concerned them. In other words, the focus of interaction during the interview was for and with the children not on the children. Some parents stated that children complained that they feel bored, didn’t want to do work and looked stress when going to school while some other parents stated their children were happy in pre-school, could cope and settled down with the environment. Perhaps, by interviewing the children we might know what were their actual feelings and what happened in pre-school in terms of teaching and learning activities and play, from their point of view.

As researching children’s perspectives is such a challenge task, manners and structure of sentences in approaching the questions to the children differed from one

child to another depending upon the individual capability of understanding such meaning or the requirements of a particular question.

The main themes or issues discussed with the children were:

- 1) Their feeling of going to school
- 2) Learning activities that take place in the setting
- 3) Their preference for learning experiences

5.2.1 Feeling of Going to Pre-school

Children's feelings of coming to school are subjective and could not be interpreted easily by only listening to their impression through the first interview question. Most of them stated that they like to go to school because they could play with friends or they could learn. However when the question was prompted further by a 'tricky' question in order to dig out the deep feeling of the children, each child had a different reason that led to the true explanation, that they didn't like to go to school.

The word "*I like to go to school*" seems embedded in the situation whereby they are 'forced' to go to school or they were not happy. Finally the answer at the end it was found out that some of the children said, "*My dad will get angry*" or "*My teacher said, if you don't want to learn, don't come to school*" or such expression: "*Sometimes I cry when I come to school... I don't know why...*"

For example, one of the children interviewed said that he liked to go to school at the beginning of interview session. After the question of what he did in the classroom was asked, he said: "*I don't like...*"

MB: *Why?*

C10: *Keep on writing...*

MB: *Writing? You feel tired?*

The boy then nodded his head.

In another situation, some children directly stated that they liked to go to school because of ‘playing with friends’ and opportunity to occupy outdoor play materials typically slide and seesaw. However when talking about classroom learning environment, indirectly, they showed signs of frustration.

MB: *Is there any play materials in the classroom?*

C8: *Nothing*

MB: *May be you have balls, blocks or plasticine...*

C8: *We don't have plasticine, but we have that 'build up' thing (small blocks-Lego)*

MB: *Ha...what else (play materials) available in the classroom?*

C8: *That's all...*

MB: *That's all? May be you have ever play with sand or water...*

C8: *No...ever.*

MB: *Never?*

C8: *The teacher didn't allow us to play because... (its dirty)... and we would mess up our dress...*

At the end of the interview session, this child said,

“Umm...my teacher would be angry ...(if we keep on playing). Then, I would not allowed to line up when it's time to go home. I'll be left alone in school!!...”

5.2.2 Play in Pre-school

Responses from the twelve children interviewed regarding learning activities in the classroom revealed that they had a very formal learning situation such as writing, letters recognising, reading, workbook-based colouring etc. Some children stated that they played in the pre-school but it appeared from their responses that the play was

only from the type of rough and tumble play such as chasing friends, play-fighting, jumping here and there. In addition, they could play only when it's 'playtime' or within snack and drink recess hour.

It was rare to hear from the children that they had an opportunity to engage in free play or had an educational element or structured play that was supervised and well planned by the teachers. Responses from the children revealed that they never had experience to engage in such kind of play that develops their mind and intelligence skills or stimulates their creative thinking or any other activities that encourage the development of their high level of cognitive ability.

Some of the children even stated that their teacher would get mad if they played such 'messy' things. They had to sit down and learn properly. “ *Teacher said, if you don't like to do your work, you don't need to come to school!*” claimed one 6 years old child. Other child said, “*no*”, in responding the question of ‘**do you play in the classroom**’. When he was asked “*why?*” he then said, “ *uh...my teacher would be angry...* ”

“ *My teacher taught me number 1, spell number one*” replied one child when she was asked what she did in the classroom. When she was asked whether the teacher let her play, she said, “ *No, no play...*” and then explained after prompting further that the teacher did teach her to sing some songs.

5.2.3 Preference of Classroom Learning Environment

Many children explicitly or indirectly stated that they liked to play with friends when they came to school. *“Playing with friends”* seems to be the most favoured element mentioned by children when giving reasons why they like to come to school. In explaining what they like to do in the classroom, most of the children stated they liked to play. *“Walking around”*, said one boy from a government based-pre-school. *“Sing some songs”*, replied a girl from a religious-based pre-school. *“ I would like to have a playground (in the school),”* expressed one 6 years old boy.

“Play Lego” said another child from one of the university-based pre-school. However, when this child was asked whether she liked to play water or sand in the classroom she then mourned, *“ I don’t want... my teacher would be angry...”* She then added, *“ my teacher said it would mess up...”* Meanwhile, in explaining his preference in classroom learning environment, a boy from a non-government pre-school spoke out that he would be happy if there were a lot of toys or play materials in the classroom. *“ I prefer the pre-school that has a lot of toys!”* he said; ending the interview session.

5.3 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter began by presenting analysis of parents’ responses which were discussed with respect to several issues concerning play in relation to their children’s learning development. In the second part of this chapter, analysis of data gained from children’s views was presented.

An assumption underpinning the parents' understanding of the concept of play was that parents did not value play as an important medium in the educational development of their children. The evidence from parents' responses was that many parents put academic achievement as the priority of their children. The vast majority of them regardless of social class thought that the children get enough play at home while at school they should learn the basic skills of 3Rs performance. In other words, analysis of parents' responses presented in this chapter shows that many of them are at loss to see educational functions of play. For them, their children come to school to 'learn' and not to play.

It could be concluded that interviewing both parents and children revealed that there seems to be a significant relationship between parents' preference for pre-school learning activities and children's attitudes towards 'learning in pre-school'. It appeared that many children were 'moulded' by their parents in terms of their perception towards pre-school. The children initially reported that coming to school is to learn; learning something related to academic achievement. However, when the children's actual feelings were 'dug out', towards the end of the interviews they expressed that they liked to play, they wanted to play and they preferred if they could have the opportunity to play. Constraints on them apparently related to inadequate play materials and teachers' anger.

CHAPTER 6:

POLICY MAKER'S AND THE ADMINISTRATORS' PERSPECTIVES OF PLAY

6.0 Introduction

The administrators in this study were referred to by different titles of posts across pre-school settings. In some pre-schools there was no head teacher post and the pre-schools were administrated by either a co-ordinator or supervisor who carried the responsibility for the pre-school programme for one school or for a school district. In some settings the pre-schools were administrated by a so called “manager” rather than a head teacher while in some others they were called “principal”. Usually the task of managers was the same as co-ordinators while principals were the person in charge of the overall program or activities for his or her own setting and not for the school district, the same as head teachers. One factor that distinguished them is that the head teachers had some sessions engaged in teaching the pre-school children while in the case of co-ordinators, managers and principals, most of them are officers and only involved in teaching supervision.

Of the 15 administrators interviewed, 4 were head teachers, 5 were co-ordinators, 3 were managers and 3 were principals. The interview sessions with these administrators took about 45 minutes to one hour each in their office.

In terms of the policy maker, specifically the Minister of Education Malaysia was supposed to be interviewed; however owing to certain circumstances, the interview

was not run on a face-to-face basis. Instead, the interview questions were faxed to the Minister and the feedback answers were also received in a written form (See Appendix E&O)

6.1 Policy Statement on Play

First and foremost, administrators in this study were asked about their pre-school philosophy, principles and whether play underpins the pre-school curriculum. Generally, all settings were using the curriculum guidelines written by the MOE with additional curriculum according to each type. Hence, the Ministry of Education Pre-school Curriculum (1998) mentioned play as one of the approaches in teaching young children; almost all the 15 administrators interviewed in this study acknowledged that there was a mention about the value of play in their pre-school prospectus. *“Play mentioned in learning techniques not in the philosophy”*, explained one manager of a private pre-school.

After reading the curriculum guidelines (CDC, MOE, 1998, p.20) it was found out that the word “play” actually gained simply a few passing mentions; it was not described as the foundation for children’s learning or medium for learning but as one of the teaching approaches, the same ‘level’ as thematic and integrated approaches which were also mentioned in the curriculum. Owing to this matter, it was dependent upon the pre-schools’ initiative how play should be implemented in teaching. Among settings that used additional curriculum or made alterations to the curriculum to suit their pre-school prospectus, there were some who claimed that they absolutely put emphasis on LTP and some who frankly stated that play is not their major emphasis.

For example, a co-ordinator from a university-based pre-school in Selangor State said,

“ We have the philosophy; learning through play. Meaning that although our school system is exam oriented but still we proceed LTP in our Kindergarten. Actually it was our main aim to establish children umm...through play to enhance their skills...”

While in contrast, a manager of one kind of non-government pre-school in Kedah State stated, *“ Many parents commented that pre-schools let children play a lot but in XXX, I think that’s not much play. Play passed a little bit because we have to finish up the workbooks”*.

In relation to parents, most of the pre-schools did not have printed statements telling them what they intend the curriculum to be, while a few mentioned this in pamphlets. Many administrators stated that they invited parents to come and explained how pre-schools run the curriculum. Only one administrator said that through their explanation, parents understand the organisation of the pre-school through play learning. *“Many parents did not bother about that. The most important is the children must know how to read”*, claimed one of the administrators interviewed.

Meanwhile, according to the policy maker or those who perhaps wrote the interview responses on his behalf or on his order, early childhood education philosophy in Malaysia is underpinned by diverse approach, integration between western educational child development theories and views of Islamic Intellectual thought and thinking that are cognizant of our religious belief. The pre-school programme in Malaysia was described as *“mainly outside the formal schooling system”*

It was stated that the Ministry had formulated a comprehensive curriculum for pre-school education and the National Education Philosophy is being integrated into it. In his feedback to the interview questions the policy maker had also stated that he was satisfied with present national curriculum and there is development of a new national pre-school curriculum which “ *was formulated by a group of child development experts from various universities in Malaysia, curriculum developers, private Kindergartens and NGOs.*” According to him, these people are also the stakeholders who are responsive to the changing needs of the society and for national development.

With reference to the ‘Policy Statement on Play’, he stated that this new curriculum uses ‘Learning Through Play’, “*using learning style that is in the context of the child’s developmental stage and put emphasis more on hands-on activities*”. Nevertheless, the child activities mentioned were illustrated as “ *carefully structured*” in order to “*incorporate learning elements and experience, which should result in the child deriving the maximum benefit from it.*”

For whatever reason, after having a look into the trial edition of the new national curriculum (CDC, MOE, 2001, p.66), ‘Learning Through Play’ was only given a few mentions, the same description as was written in the previous curriculum (CDC, MOE, 1998, p.20). The additional information about play, written in the new curriculum was only mentioned in two pages. First on page 70 whereby 10 types of play materials are listed as Children’s Learning Materials while on page 72, sand play, water play and manipulative craft were mentioned as some examples of activities that could be implemented in pre-school. Commonly, the general emphasis

of the curriculum is more towards children's learning outcomes rather than the learning process itself. Besides, the curriculum is based on compartmentalised subjects.

6.2 The Meaning and Importance of Play

Most administrators in this study were happy and confident to define play in relation to its quality and what it does for children. One government pre-school co-ordinator described play in terms of its importance towards children's opportunity of going through their wider social life. Other administrators defined play as the opportunity to develop children's potential.

Many of the definitions given by the administrators actually illustrated the roles, value, purposes and the importance of play in children's development within an educational context. Play, they argued, is a natural tendency for children that brings happiness and satisfaction for them; vital and crucial in their life. *"... If there is no play children cannot develop according to stages so it's like their development will be stopped...they are going to die, not physical but the science of becoming a child"* said one principal who has a degree in Psychology.

Nevertheless, it appeared that although many administrators feel play to be important, others among them seriously argued the advantages and benefit of play that might not apply to all kind of play. *"But not all play giving a good input..."* proposed one manager of a non-government pre-school; he then lamented, *" For example in XXX (one type of government pre-school), they are too much play to the*

extent that children couldn't read!!" A head teacher from a religious-based pre-school also had a similar notion, "*play has 2 meanings. First, play for nothing. Children tired and gained nothing. Second, play while learning; children tired but gained something and feel fun...*"

In other situations, some administrators considered play as an important element in children's learning not more than 'a tool that could remove the sense of boredom' while in another respect, play is perceived as important by some administrators only if the play - according to them- "could be 'converted' to education". Starting from this variety of points of view, it could be understood that the administrators seem to have different perceptions of the significance of play in children's learning within the pre-school context.

If we refer to the interviewing responses from the policy maker, there was an acknowledgment on the importance of play and a statement on quality link between play and learning. He stated, "*...These natural characteristics of play activity in the child should not be stopped in the process of teaching and educating them but it should be fully exploited and utilised to facilitate learning*". There was also encouragement of the use of play as relevant approach in children's learning, "*Therefore, we should mobilise and utilise this natural tendency in the child to benefit the learning process...*"

6.3 Play Significance in Classroom Practice

Although it was evident from teachers and parents that play was addressed in all types of pre-schools managed by the interviewed administrators, there appeared to be many interpretations of how this was translated in practice. Interviews with the 15 administrators revealed that in some pre-schools, play was put as foundation for learning or in other words children were encouraged to play and the learning activities occurred through play. This kind of play is play in a meaningful context as proposed by pioneers in child development and education. *“Play not as a subject itself but play should become one of the approach of the subject or activities,”* explained a principal in a university-based pre-school.

Pertaining to another interpretations, even though many of the administrators believed that children learn something when they play, however, in terms of implementation they seem to have many versions of understanding and they didn't put play as medium for learning. Therefore, the ways they allocated play in the classroom context were different from those practised by experts in early years education.

In most of the pre-schools, play was actually implemented in a sense that children are 'playing in passing while learning'. In other words, some administrators accepted play as 'play as alternate activity within a formal learning sessions'. For example, a head teacher from religious-based pre-school tried to elaborate the concept, *“...So the concept is 'alternate playing' means that play should be there even for only about 5 minutes. Must play even for 5 minutes”*. In line with the view of 'playing

while learning' is play as 'the interval' within the session of learning as mentioned by a principal from private pre-school, "*They play as they learn. They learn through playing. They must play while learning. Singing is part of playing also*" and in explaining activities done in the classroom she added as further explanation, "*I do some story-telling within the session, as what people said 'the interval'; ... we also do singing in the class. Without that singing period, we also do singing interval...*"

When the LTP concept which was translated into Malay as "Bermain Sambil Belajar", was interpreted into a situation whereby play in the classroom is perceived as doing playing activities while a learning session occurred, it leads into another interpretation scenario. A co-ordinator of a certain district area of government pre-school in Kedah State commented in detail,

"...but for me, I didn't put emphasis towards that. I didn't say learning through play but I used phrase 'learning through experience'...so we expose the children to experiences and they learn through it. I don't like 'playing while learning' because learning should not occur while doing something else at the same time they learn. When they play, they must play seriously and when learning, it must be hard learning not play while learning or playing alternately within learning. We cannot say that learning is secondary and if the teacher use that term, it's not put the seriousness in learning..."

Perhaps because of this second interpretation, many of the administrators stated that play in the classroom is "*not to be implemented in all aspects, but, based on the needs of a particular subject*" and in addition one head teacher stated that she put play as a 'treat' for passive behaviour. In other words, she allocated play like singing a song during a learning session in order to 'activate' the children to learn, "*activities depend on children's condition. If the children look passive, don't want to learn, refuse books then the teacher has got to do something...*"

In another situation, play was actually practised by some settings as ‘work then play’ rather than as the medium for learning. [This situation was clarified by 4 out of 15 administrators interviewed, “ *We spread out the lesson into thematic learning approach and then working on worksheets. Who finish first could go to the provided corners such as cube corner, creative corner or reading corner...*” stated a co-ordinator of one of university-based pre-schools elaborating current teaching style in her setting. In some circumstances, some administrators considered ‘work then play’ as a reward of finishing their work on time. A manager of a non-government pre-school type explained further this matter, “*If they do their work faster, teacher would let them play. Means that the teacher put it as a reward and the child would be happy...*” In addition, a government pre-school co-ordinator in one of the district areas in Selangor defined play as “ *a rest time for children*”. Some administrators who are in agreement with his view, put play only as activity during recess hour.

Meanwhile, the policy maker appeared to elaborate how ‘learning through play’ should be translated in classroom practice shortly and in an implicit way. When he was asked whether the curriculum has something to do with learning through play approach, he just insisted that the new curriculum uses learning through play approach and explained further, “*...the teacher does not lecture, drill or force them to do worksheets but emphasises more on hands-on activity.*” In discussing an answer of another question he stated: “ *The curriculum is designed to inculcate a positive learning atmosphere and a play-oriented manner in which the pre-school child learns best.*”

6.4 Incorporating Play in Pre-school Learning

Generally, all administrators agreed play should be incorporated in classroom teaching. One of them even stated, “ *If in pre-school level it supposed to be researched. Find out and then how we could exploit that to be better and we would get more advantages.*”

However, there seem to be certain conditions highlighted by the majority of the administrators if play were an integral part of pre-school programs. The conditions mentioned by them were almost similar to the conditions mentioned by teachers during their interviews. First, play according to them must not be allocated for a long period of time. “*As long 15 minutes, enough. If they play until half an hour, this is not play. This is lying! Play only for a while*” argued one co-ordinator. Second, the play must be based on academic play concept. In other words, the play that was accepted by many administrators must be well-planned structured educational play not free play. As stated by one of the head teachers, “ *...we have to see what type of play is it. We have to put some limit for play...it suppose to be ‘education’ in the classroom...only play that could develop their IQ*”.

Third, in relation to the second condition, play according to some administrators must be guided, counselled and taught by an adult or what people said as ‘teacher-led’ activity not child-initiated activity. This condition is slightly different from what was encouraged by experts in early years education whereby children were supposed to be encouraged to play freely and be intrinsically motivated not initiated by teachers. Fourth, there should be balance between time to play and time to learn and

it also depends to the children chronological ages. The older the children, the lesser amount of play time.

Throughout the interview only 6 out of 15 administrators agreed to put play purely as the foundation for learning and perceived it as the appropriate way of teaching young children regardless of ages or any other additional conditions. One of them encouraged, “ *That’s a good idea...teachers should know that play should be integrated, should be incorporated into whatever curriculum or syllabus they are going to develop...yes, I really want to do that!*”

6.5 Play in Relation to Pre-school Prestige, Education System and Parents’ Wishes

There were concerns explicated by 12 out of 15 administrators interviewed regarding play in relation to pre-school prestige and parents’ wishes. All pre-school felt that co-operation between teachers and parents could be advantageous. Yet, sometimes there were difficult conflicts between the administrators’ or practitioners’ view of the child’s needs and of the parents’ needs. In some situations they have to support the child while in another circumstance they have to support parents as well. This requires negotiations of great interpersonal sensitivity.

Many administrators in this study complained that there was a community pressure for academic activity, coming particularly from parents. This kind of pressure is widely felt both by the administrators and by their teaching staffs. “*Before, we didn’t concentrate on formal teaching but umm...because of recent demand and current*

demand of parents who want the pre-school to be a formal school, I have to follow them...” commented a university-based pre-school co-ordinator expressed her feeling. *“They are so concerned that their child might not learn how to read right away!”*, lamented another administrator. *“...This value is measured by parents. They send their children and then after one year they want them know how to read. They didn’t see another aspect...”* a non-government based pre-school co-ordinator highlighted the issue. In addition, one of the private pre-school managers reported that she had experience with one parent who had high expectations toward pre-school, inquired of the teachers, *“my child play in school?”* and then complained, *“Why did you ask her to play and I send her here to learn!!”*

Moreover, LTP in pre-school was also undervalued by primary school teachers and one of the administrators interviewed reported that some of them believed that too much play in pre-school is one of the major factors why children couldn’t read.

The policy maker in his responses to the interview questions also highlighted the issue that the whole teaching and learning process in most Malaysian pre-schools had become very formal. *“This the result of the misunderstanding that early childhood education as ‘going to school (formal education) at an early age’ and not as what should be correctly viewed as education for early childhood level”*, he prompted further when explaining his opinion about implementing LTP in pre-school education. It also appeared from the interview responses that the policy maker ‘blamed’ society in terms of undervaluing the quality of play experience for children. He argued,

“As such, parents, teachers and society will expect the child to master the basic three R’s; Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic at an early age. They forget the natural tendency of the child to play but subject them to formal education and assessed them on the test and examination results...”

In relation to the education system, a principal of one private pre-school who had been exposed to education abroad felt that outlook and parents’ expectations of western countries are completely different from what we have in Malaysia. “ *It’s so academic oriented here*”, she said. Another administrator who gained his Master degree from Australia commented,

“ Umm...actually I have discussed this with one of the lecturers in Australia regarding Learning through Play System. We discussed and we concluded that we disrupted because ... most of the children they have to do their curriculum based on exam-oriented system. This is not suitable in pre-school for learning through play but this is how the children can develop...although this is not suit the curriculum when we go further but it still good for the children to umm...to play”

6.6 Factors Impeding the Progress of Play Learning Experience

As mentioned earlier, all administrators basically agreed to have play incorporated in pre-school learning programmes even with some conditions underpinned by them. Nonetheless, when they were asked regarding steps that had been taken to prepare for appropriate play environment, many of them changed the topic of discussion into factors presenting impediments to the progress of play learning experiences in their settings.

There were a number of constraints mentioned by the administrators interviewed, which for them intervened in planning the play-learning environment. These included the demands of the parents as being elaborated earlier, which bring in

particular the pressure to use more formal methods and to obtain reliable evidence of learning. The outcomes being viewed more important than the process of learning itself forced many teachers to limit the curriculum and focus more on children's academic achievement. Primary school teachers' attitudes toward play in pre-school were also one of the influential factors. Those teachers keep complaining and condemning that play is one of the major factors why children couldn't read when they are supposed to be ready for that once they entering statutory schooling. *"So we made decision that no play for 6 years old children or learn first then only they can play..."* explained one head teacher.

Additionally, some administrators not from government type of pre-schools complained about not having teacher assistants which for them made it difficult for the teachers to manage without additional help. The low ratio of adults to children was also problematic in a sense that their needs to meet health and safety requirements were not available. *" Unfortunately, economically, we can't afford to have only 25 children in one setting..."* lamented one of the administrators.

This statement revealed that one of the major factors providing an impediment to the play progress towards meaningful use of quality play learning experience is financial constraints or insufficient budget. This factor then brings another constraint which is the problems with resources and insufficient provision for play environments, both indoors and outdoors in terms of inadequate and narrow spaces. *" We can't afford to buy toys, it too expensive..."* one head teacher frankly informed their real situation. *"We can't arrange classroom into corners... narrow and limited space"*, commented another.

In other respects, some administrators put the structure of the school timetable as one of the constraints in the sense that they felt that teachers in Malaysia are fighting against limited time and 3 hours for some of them is not enough for inserting play in teaching. Finally but not the least is the issue of insufficient training for pre-school teachers in the sense that not all pre-school teachers are exposed to appropriate training and are not really qualified in terms of experience and academic qualifications.

6.7 Suggestions for Improving the Implementation of Play

Even though many administrators spoke out about constraints they faced in deploying play into classroom practice, they were asked to propose some suggestions of how play could be improved in the aspect of implementation.

The administrators interviewed came out with some good ideas that could be shared together among practitioners, parents as well as stakeholders. Suggestions proposed by the administrators could be summarised as below:

1. Adding more play materials and equipment to have more corners for play and having appropriate buildings for pre-school settings which means extra budget and more financial aid for play provision and early childhood education.
2. Partnership with parents. Explain to parents and community about the meaningful concept of learning through play that could be organised through seminars, workshops or dialogue discussions.

3. The teachers themselves must have meaningful understanding of the play concept and the skills by giving them more opportunities for their professional development.
4. Co-operation from top management to translate this suggestion into reality.

6.8 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has presented the concept of play in relation to child development and its appropriateness in classroom practice as viewed by administrators as well as the policy maker. Factors impeding the progress of play learning experiences and suggestions for improving the implementation of play as viewed by the administrators were also presented.

In summary, findings from the administrators' and the policy maker's point of view revealed that they agreed in general to have play incorporated in pre-school learning programs. However, in terms of their understanding of play in relation to its significance in classroom practice, many administrators involved in this study did not see play as having a great educational value; instead, they considered that play is not a useful pedagogical tool although it might be helpful as a treatment for disruptive behaviour.

CHAPTER 7:

OBSERVING PLAY IN CLASSROOM PRACTICE

7.0 Introduction

This chapter presents results from the second method of data collection which involved a small-scale observation. The observation results provide important data in giving ‘the depth of the matter’ and follow up information provided during the interview.

As mentioned above in the Methodology Chapter, the basic principle was to observe activities or tasks focusing on duration and context of any kind of play activities that might engage during teaching and learning time in the classroom. The observation also recorded how play was allocated and practised in each particular setting. In carrying out the observation tasks 15 teachers were observed when they were teaching in their own classrooms and these continuous observations were made throughout the pre-school session with the exception of snack and drink time or so-called ‘playtime’ which always took place between 20-30 minutes in each pre-schools. The exception also applied to some periods which were devoted to class activity such as morning assembly and transition between activities.

In analysing the observation schedule (see **Appendix F**) used in this study, the raw data in a form of words and anecdotal recording were transferred into summary sheet

tables. (**Tables 7.1** and **7.2** are some examples of these sheets). Through those summary sheet tables, the data were converted into what is called as a ‘write up’.

7.1 Time Spent and Duration of Play Across Settings

The data are presented and discussed by type of each setting and the general conclusion is presented at the end of the chapter.

7.1.1 Observation in University-based Pre-schools



Figure 7.1: Opportunity for free choice parallel play activity

One of the university-based pre-schools visited (UBC) was located in an urban area and the teachers were university graduates and well trained in early education. Over 110 minutes of continuous observation, it appeared that teachers from this setting were teaching through play. As shown in **Figure 7.1** and **7.2**, the children were given opportunities to experience various types of play such as role-play, manipulative

play, constructive play, creative play i.e. For example, during the first 20 minutes of learning sessions the children had opportunities for free choice parallel play activities while the teacher observed the play and participated with the children. The children



Figure 7.2: Children play at block corner

were also exposed to several minutes of daily routine activities such as arranging shoes, keeping school bag, brushing teeth etc., which could be considered as practical life play. After having 5 minutes of song and movement activity, the children were divided into groups and had 30 minutes of more parallel play activities; two different kinds of play. The play was structured and facilitated by the teacher with the help of two assistants. Another time for example children were also involved in 20 minutes free-choice child-initiated play supervised by the teacher and assistants. **Table 7.1** illustrates the results of three days' observation in university-based pre-school across three settings.

Table 7.1: Play Allocation in University-based (UB) Pre-schools

Pre-school	Length of Observation	Duration of Play	Play Activities	Play Description
UBA (1/2/02)	100 minutes	10 minutes	Story-telling	Play then work
		35 minutes	Creative Play (Drawing & colouring)	As a subject: teacher-led activity
		25 minutes	Song & movement	Academic play – learning to spell words
		15 minutes	Physical play indoors	Throwing balls – play as alternate activity
UBB (17/2/02)	120 minutes	20 minutes	Colouring	Using workbooks – play as children’s work
		40 minutes	Block Play	Only children who finished their work (colouring) could play and at the same time this play activity conducted simultaneously with reading activity (testing) led by the teacher.
		20 minutes	Dough Play Cut & Paste	Different 2 parallel play activities with one academic-based activity (writing & reading in group) then rotated
UBC 7/3/02	110 minutes	20 minutes	Block Play Manipulative Play (2 different materials)	Free choice parallel play activities – supervised and guided by the teacher
		5 minutes	Practical life play	Routine activities guided by teacher
		5 minutes	Song & movement	The lyrics related to the topic going to be learned
		2 minutes	Story-telling	The contents inter-related to the learning topic
		30 minutes	Creative Play	Different parallel play activities – structured and facilitated by teacher
		10 minutes	Creative Play Constructive Play	Continued Free choices play activity after the structured play
		20 minutes	Role-play Reading time	Free choices child-initiated play – supervised and observed by teacher
			Physical Play	

Observation in another two university-based pre-schools (UBA & UBB) as illustrated in table 7.1, described different situations. Even though these two pre-schools also implemented such kinds of play activities during learning sessions, the play generally was not used as a medium for leaning. Instead, the play was put as ‘work then play’ or ‘play then work’, as a time-filler, as alternate activity and in many situations the children were left to play alone without any involvement from the teacher. These two pre-schools were using workbooks as their main activities and in one; a group play was allocated simultaneously with another two groups of academic-based activities, then rotated.

7.1.2 Observation in State Religious Department Pre-schools



Figure 7.3: Session for 'handcraft and creativity'

In the State Religious Department Pre-schools, there was no such play activities engaged in classroom practice in any of the 3 different settings visited except 'art and craft' activities. During three days of observation tasks, the 'handcraft and creativity' which might be considered as 'creative play' was taught as a subject in each setting taking around 40 minutes to 1 hour from 3 hours of a half-day pre-school session. However teachers led the 'play' and it was actually performed to the children in a formal way (figure 7.3). In some learning sessions, they used workbooks for the purpose of teaching 'handcraft and creativity'. With reference to the classroom timetable prepared by the head teacher of school, the 'handcraft and creativity' subject is taught only once a week.



Figure 7.4: Classroom teaching and learning climate

Meanwhile, as shown in figure 7.4 it seems that children in this type of pre-school did not have an opportunity to experience child-initiated free play except during playtime. Yet, they were involved only in rough and tumble play at pre-school yard and no physical play apparatus was provided for the children except in one of the pre-schools which located in a suburban area.

7.1.3 Observation in Muslim Youth Movement NGO Pre-Schools

Observation results in this type of pre-school indicated that ‘song and movement’ or ‘music and sound’ is the typical type of play activity allocated across 3 pre-schools. During the first day of observations, ‘music and sound’ was allocated three times. The first song and movement operated as an introduction activity before the formal learning occurred and it took only about 10 minutes from the whole 150 minutes of continuous observation. In other words, this kind of play activity could be considered as ‘play then work’. The second and third time of song and movement was allocated

as 'play in passing within a formal learning' and it took only about 1 minute each. For example when the teacher was teaching the children the sounds of some letters, she asked the children to sing 'ABC' (Figure 7.5)



Figure 7.5: Play 'in passing' within a formal learning

The second observation in another setting also revealed the same situation. However song and movement occurred only once as 'play then work' and it took only about 3 minutes from 130 minutes of continuous observation. In the third setting observed, the same lyrics of a particular song and movement were repeated three times within 10 minutes of 'extra' time before playtime. In this situation, the singing activity was put as a 'time filler' in order to memorise the content and context of a particular 'practical' religious subject (Steps in performing 'ablution' before prayer).

Another typical play activity observed in this type of pre-school was 'playing with plasticine'. Nevertheless, the function of this kind of play was not to play with natural materials, instead, it was used as instructional learning material in introducing

figures of letters. In two of the three settings visited, children were asked to copy letters’ shapes by using the plasticine.

If we refer to the status of play implemented in this type of preschool, table 7.2 illustrates that most of the play activities were based on academic achievement and many of the play sessions were implemented as ‘playing while learning’ and ‘play alternately’.

Table 7.2:
Observation Results in Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) NGO Pre-schools

Pre-school	Length of Observation	Duration of Play	Play Activities	Play Description
MYMA (5/2/02)	150 minutes	10 minutes	Song & movement	Play then work
		1 minute	Singing a song	Play as interval activity during a formal learning
		4 minutes	Card Games	Academic-based play led by teacher– learning to spell words, associate word to picture
		1 minute	Singing a song	Play interval within a formal learning
		30 minutes	Free Play	Children are having free child-initiated activities in groups while the teacher involved in individual teaching or assessment – play as alternate activity
MYMB (6/2/02)	130 minutes	3 minutes	Song & movement	Play then work
		25 minutes	Playing with plasticine	Teacher-led academic-based activity – shaping plasticine into number figures
MYMC (18/2/02)	145 minutes	1 minute	‘short while’ body movement	Play then work – to ‘activate’ the children to learn
		2 minutes	Song & movement	Play as a ‘time- filler’ whereby the lyrics of the song related to particular subject learned
		2 minutes	Song & movement	(Repetition)
		2 minutes	Song & movement	(Repetition)
		15 minutes	Story-telling	Play as alternate activity
		10 minutes	Playing with plasticine	Academic based play led by teacher – shaping letters using the plasticine

In terms of time spent on play during the day regardless of type and status of play, table 7.2 also shows that the play activities in this type of pre-school were allocated

less than one third of 3 hours per half-day pre-school session. For example, the play activities during the second day of observation took only 28 minutes from 130 minutes of continuous observation while in the third day, it was allocated only 25 minutes from 145 minutes of continuous observation.

7.1.4 Observation in Unity Department Government Funded Pre-school

Generally all teaching and learning sessions observed in the 3 different settings from this type of pre-school gave opportunity for children to have free choice activity between 10 to 20 minutes within 3 hours of a half-day pre-school session. However, the opportunity to play occurred as ‘work then play’ or ‘play first then do their work’. This kind of activity usually involved manipulative and constructive play, and sometimes, educational games were also used for this purpose. During the observation in the second centre, the teacher provided the children experience of a structured academic play. She used one kind of educational games as instructional learning material.

In many situations the play activities which were allocated when the observation task took place were put as ‘play in passing’ during a formal learning session of a particular topic learned. For example, when the children were learning ‘counting from 1-5’, the teacher and the children sang together a certain song that has lyrics related to the theme. This kind of play activity lasted about 2-3 minutes within a formal learning, the same play scenario allocated in the non-government pre-school type. ‘Playing with plasticine’ was also engaged in one of its pre-schools, however, the same as in NGO pre-school, the function of the play was for academic outcomes.



Figure 7.6: 'Creative Play' - drawing and colouring based on workbook

'Creative play' was used in the government-based pre-school as one of the 9 areas of specialization that must be developed and exposed to the children, so-called "Aesthetics and Creativity Development". During the observation of this particular session in one of the three pre-schools visited, this kind of 'creative play' was seen as 'conducted based on workbooks provided' and the function was to let children 'do work' not 'play' (Figure 7.6) However, one of the three teachers observed that apparently putting play as foundation for learning did not used workbooks in teaching. In developing creativity skills among children, she allocated the creative play as two different kinds of parallel play activities; one was led by the teacher while the other one was also structured but more child-initiated. The two activities then rotated between two groups of children.

7.1.5 Observation in Private Pre-schools

Private pre-schools were managed by different agencies or individual administrations; therefore, it was not unexpected that the three different settings gave different results for how play was implemented in each setting.

The first setting visited seemed to 'fill up' the teaching learning sessions with academic based activity that focused on 3R development skills. During 140 minutes of continuous observation, the children were involved in reading skills enrichment for most of the time regardless of subjects they learned. Only 17 minutes of the teaching learning times were occupied by play and the play such as typical 'song and movement' or 'music & sound' was put as 'interval' activity within a formal learning or 'work then play'. The 10 minutes of 'learning while playing' that was implemented by the teacher was subject-based play and led by her in association to the topic learned during the day of observation.

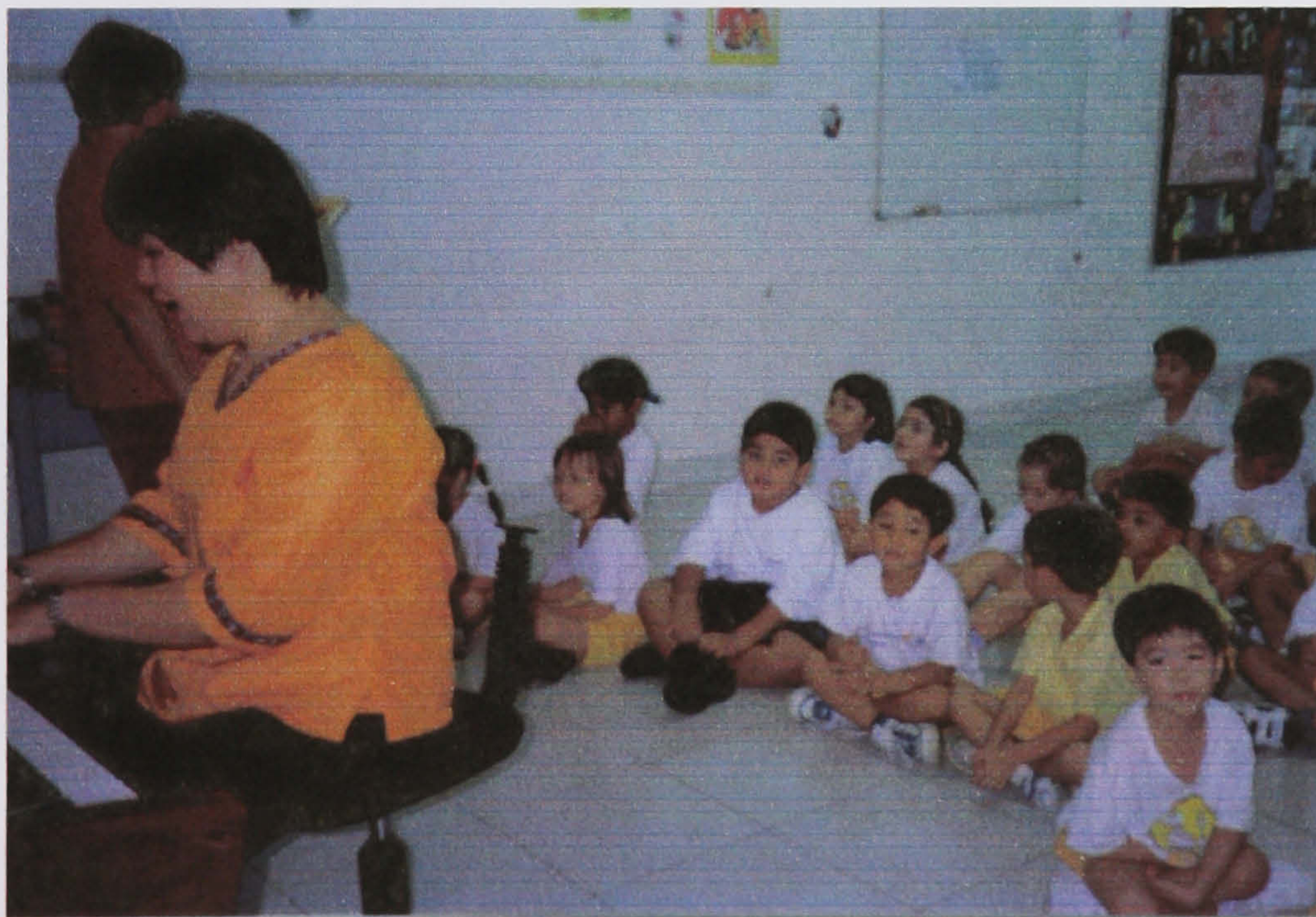


Figure 7.7: Learning 'music' as a subject

The second setting, located in a city centre is known as a pre-school for children from 'elite' and 'upper class' family. During 2 hours of continuous observations, there was no play activity implemented during classroom teaching and the learning sessions occurred in a formal situation. Only once within this 2 hours, the teacher was implementing play as interval activity and the children were let to sing 'in passing' for 5 minutes within a formal learning session. There was also a 30 minutes session deployed for play from the type of 'song & movement' as shown in Figure 7.7. However, this special session did not occurred within teaching learning sessions. Instead, 'Music' is considered as one of the subjects which is compulsory for all children and they have special periods and a special teacher for it.

Observation in the third setting also produced similar results. The play in this setting was implemented in the same way as mentioned before; 'play in passing', 'play then work' and also play as a compulsory subject involving all children, such as physical play which was conducted as fulfilling '30 minutes Physical Education session' written in the pre-school time-table.

7.2 General Comments on Play Organisation in Classroom Practice



Figure 7.8: Sitting still and 'keep quite' learning environment

Generally, regardless of settings, more than two thirds of the learning sessions observed in this study occurred in a very formal way, with demands made on the children to follow instructions, to complete workbook, to colour in as required by their teachers. Children as appeared in Figure 7.8 and 7.9 were found to be passive recipients in their learning rather than supposed to be active participants. The children also did not have opportunities to make their own decisions about their learning. In the vast majority of the classrooms, children's needs and initiative are undervalued. Only small numbers of teachers used play in teaching and implemented it in the manner advocated by experts in early years education. The same as those described by Kagan (1990), the classrooms observed in this study were often marked by rigid schedules. The teachers mostly used drilling methods in enhancing the pre-school children's acquisition of knowledge and development of memory.



Figure 7.9: Example of Organising for learning in vast majority of the classrooms

From the teachers observed in this study, only two used play as a foundation or medium in teaching young children. One of these two teachers was from a university-based pre-school while another one was from a government-based pre-school. However, the play organisation of both teachers could not be generalised to all settings within these categories. For example in the other two university-based pre-schools play was used by the teachers as ‘work then play’ i.e. not as a medium for learning. The same variation occurred in the government-based pre-school whereby the play was not put as foundation for learning. Instead, the play was put as an alternate activity and the children were not expected to learn through the playing they were engaged in.

In a situation whereby play was put as a special subject in the timetable and compulsory to be taught by teachers, many of the activities that occurred were based on workbooks or were teacher led and the children did not really have an opportunity to explore knowledge and skills through play (Figure 7.10).



Figure 7.10: Children involved in a structured play led by teacher

Most of the settings observed, allowed the children to play freely only during playtime after having their snacks and drink. However, it was rare to have pre-schools provided with a wide range of physical play facilities and various types of play materials that could be occupied by children during learning sessions.

In many cases, the play which was put as an alternate activity, work then play or parallel play with academic-based activity, was actually unattended and did not receive attention from the teacher. In other words, the teachers ignored this kind of play and focused their attention and guidance only on academic-based activity.

CHAPTER 8:

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

8.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of the study raised from the data analysis presented in the preceding chapters 4,5,6 and 7 of this dissertation. The five research questions identified in Chapter 1 will be addressed in the discussion of the results based on themes which will be presented according to several relevant subdivided topics of discussion. This chapter also addresses implications and limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and then ending up with the conclusion.

8.1 Discussion of the Main Findings

The study interviewed 30 teachers, 30 parents and 15 administrators from five different types of settings; university-based pre-schools, Selangor State Religious Department pre-schools, Muslim Youth Movement NGO pre-schools, Unity Department government-based pre-schools and private pre-schools. The results of the 75 interviews conducted during the course of this study provided a richly detailed picture of teachers', parents' and administrators' understanding of the concept of play in relation to children's learning in the Malaysian pre-school context.

Consequently, it is argued, these different understandings have a significant impact on how play is allocated in classroom practice across five different types of settings.

8.1.1 Patterns and Categories in Teachers' Understanding of the Concept of Play Across Settings

With reference to the first, second and third research questions as stated in Chapter 1:9, the results from the interviews conducted with 30 teachers demonstrated that there were a mismatch between teachers' understanding of the word play in child development and play in relation to the educational program of the children. Almost all teachers' responses revealed that they readily accept that young children need to play and they do recognise play values and roles in constructing child development. However, their perceptions toward play when it relates to children's learning in classroom practice indicated a marked discrepancy between the stated value. There were three categories or patterns of teachers' understanding. The first category refers to teachers who stated that they are teaching through play and they put play as the foundation for children's learning. Children in their classroom were given opportunities to be involved in a meaningful context of LTP characterised by criteria in line with those proposed by experts and professionals in early years education (Curtis, 1986; DES, 1990; EYCG, 1992; Johnson & Ershler, 1982; Moyles, 1989; Bruce and Maggit, 1999).

Teachers in this category were rare, only 4 out of 30, and they also did not emphasise 3R achievement when teaching young children. Two of the teachers worked in one of the university-based pre-schools, were degree holders, had attended national and

international professional training courses and both had more than 10 years experience in teaching. The other two teachers were from the Unity Department Government-based pre-school. One of these had been involved in teaching young children for 24 years and the other had undertaken several training courses.

The second category refers to teachers who claimed that they provide children with activities that involved LTP. However, after further exploration made throughout the interview regarding their perceptions toward play and its significance in classroom practice, and play in relation to children's learning; a more complex situation was revealed. Teachers in this category perceived play as having one or more of the following features:

- Too much play leads to the loss of teaching and learning time
- Play should occur for a limited time
- Play is only appropriate if implemented in a form of academic play with specific outcomes enhancing 3R skills
- Play must be led and guided by teachers and children should not be left to play freely
- Play is suitable only for less able or new entering school children
- The main aim of deploying play was either to release children from boredom, or to 'attract' interest and attention before formal learning started or as a reward after finish work NOT as foundation for learning
- Play could lead to some negative effects on children's learning: dawdling, thoughtlessness, negligence, tiredness and lack of concentration on learning, and other discipline problems.

The vast majority of the teachers interviewed, regardless of settings were from this category.

The third category comprises the teachers who admitted that they did not teach through play and they preferred to teach children in a formal, traditional way as they were used to this. Teachers in this category believed that children had their opportunity to play during break, before or after the learning session; and some of them even perceived that time to play should be at home and not in school. In addition, they also perceived that play has ‘bad characteristics’ such as thoughtlessness and causing discipline problems. This made them feel that play cannot be practised as an approach in teaching. This is actually opposed to teachers’ theory in Bennett’s (1997) study that stated, “*children experience less frustration in play, which reduces discipline problems*” (p.32). As with the first category, there were small numbers of teachers from this category, three mainly from State Religious Department pre-school type and two from an NGO pre-school type.

In general, teachers from both rural and urban areas, regardless of settings, did not differ in terms of style in play allocation in classroom practice. These teachers in general have similar academic qualifications as well as limited exposure to professional training. They both have to face the pressure of the larger society for the academic achievement of the child. Previous background literature Ling Chu Poh (1983), Rohaty (1986) and EPRD, MOE (1990) stated that many pre-school teachers taught children in a very formal way. This study supports the contention.

Having analysed all the teachers' interview data, length of experience in teaching seems not to be significant since there were also some 'senior' teachers who didn't practise teaching through play in a meaningful context of learning. Only teachers holding degrees who specialised in child development and education and those who had been exposed to professional training perceived play in pre-school similarly to the purposes and features as proposed by Froebel (1826), Piaget (1896), Weininger (1980), Rubin et al (1983). These teachers also implemented play in a similar way to that proposed in the Early Learning Goals (QCA, 1999).

With reference to the fourth research question, there is no evidence of systematic differences between the philosophy and type of settings in respect to play understanding. The differences are at the level of the individual teachers' knowledge, professional training and academic qualifications not the philosophy or type of pre-schools. However, there were some differences related to classroom learning environment and the provision of play resources and materials. But, these differences were not examined systematically as part of this study which focussed on examining teachers' understanding of the play concept not on play resources and materials. An examination of the latter issue was the subject of a separate study in English pre-schools (Mastura and Lindsay, 2002).

8.1.2 From Beliefs Into Practice

In answering the third research question, results from the observational data provided rich evidence of what was practised in pre-school classrooms. Only 2 out of 15 teachers observed in teaching allocated play as a medium and foundation for

learning. One was from a university-based pre-school while another one was a government funded pre-school teacher. The remaining of 13 teachers seemed to allocate 'learning through play' as advocated by the majority of them during interview sessions but the play practised by them appeared to be not in line with what was advocated by Sharp and Mannings (1977), Moyles (1989), Bruce (1991), Tassonni and Hucker (2000), and Macintyre (2001). From these 13 teachers, there were 2 from university-based pre-schools, 3 from religious-based pre-schools, 3 from NGO pre-schools, 2 from government-based pre-schools and 3 from private pre-schools.

Results from the observational data indicated that play activities tended not to provide learning experiences of acceptable quality in most of the settings. The teachers tend to take a more didactic role and children are less physically active, spend very limited time exploring environment around them and more time sitting still. Flash cards, song and movement and playing with plasticine were the typical type of play activities implemented in the classroom. The materials used for play actually were primarily used as 'instructional learning materials' in teaching and not for other various purposes of play. When too little time was allowed for children to play with materials and even when time was given, the teachers did not extend the children's play towards further learning. This kind of situation was referred to by an HMI Report (DES, 1992) as 'the undervaluing of play'.

Besides, 13 out of the 15 teachers observed based their teaching on workbooks and exercise books more frequently than any other activity. Ibn Khaldun (1332) was very much against the use of concise textbooks or workbooks in teaching, as children's

learning style was compressed to the content of the workbooks which make children finally lost interest in learning (Quraishi, 1983).

This sample was also found to restrict to 'academic play'. In other words, play engaged primarily as a form of academic play and focused on developing 3R skills. It means that opportunity for children to play was not in broader perspectives and challenging environments as advocated by Johnson & Ershler (1982), Curtis (1986) and Moyles (1989). Play is potentially broader than that purpose. There seem few chances for children to develop their socio-emotional development, higher level of cognitive thinking, natural curiosity through problem solving and other aspect of development. Could this be considered as 'fulfilling holistic and wholesome development of the children' as proclaimed in the Malaysian National Pre-school Curriculum? Even in Al Ghazali's view, the central roles of play as cited in Al-Barjis (1980) is to cultivate happiness and self-satisfaction in child's socio-emotional development and to makes children feel that education is pleasure and joyful not to feel pressure of academic stress!

Additionally, the educational games or academic games are not considered as play by Rubin et. al. (1983) in their survey of play literature because games, in contrast with play, have externally applied rules. Based on Piaget's observation (1962) play with rules (games) is a feature of children in the late preoperational and operational period approximately 6 years onwards because this kind of play involves complexity in recognition and acceptance of rules (Sylva and Lunt, 1982), Smith (1994).

Owing to situations whereby teachers in this study often used play as a ‘time-filler’ or ‘alternate activity’, it could be viewed as ‘lacking both purpose and challenge’, as concluded in the Bennett and Kell study (1989). Play also has become apart from the learning process itself. Maulby (1997) argued that research in early childhood development does not support the idea that play is something to do instead of learning. According to her, the way that young children learn is part and parcel of the way they act naturally in the world – through play.

‘Play then work’ or ‘work then play’ was also observed practised by the majority of teachers from university-based pre-schools, government-based pre-schools and private pre-schools. Even though many teachers said that they put that kind of play as reward for children and encouragement to finish their work, again, this kind of play apart from the learning environment appears to be ‘quite ridiculous and pointless’ as viewed by Cass (1971:66). Tassoni and Hucker (2000) in defining play stated that one of its features is something children choose to do because they like to do it, not for an end product or reward.

The situation then is similar to that reported by OFSTED (1993,p.10) on the standards and quality education in the UK reception classes:

“Fewer than half teachers fully exploited the educational potential of play. In more than a third of the schools play was only recreational, it lacked on educational purpose and was usually undertaken only after work had been completed”

If in the UK it has been challenged for many years to give play its central role in the primary schools, in Malaysia it has been challenged to give play its central role even in pre-school classrooms!!

8.1.3 Patterns and Categories in Parents' Understanding of the Concept of Play

With reference to the first and second research questions, generally, all parents interviewed in this study accepted the needs of their children to play but only a few of them considered play to be their way of learning and preferred to have an informal learning environment for their children. Therefore, many parents expected their children to go to school to learn in a formal way and as also stated by many of the teachers interviewed, parents questioned whether the pre-school put sufficient emphasis on work, while play is something that they considered children can do at home. Curtis (1994, p.33) pointed out this issue and stated:

“ When parents tell their children to go and play, they normally expect them to engage in some form of pleasurable activity which is self-initiated and which does not involve adult participation or too much supervision ”

The study shows that the 30 parents' views of play in pre-school could be divided into two main categories. The first category refers to parents who preferred their children to be given opportunities to explore and experience learning through quality play environment in pre-school programme. These parents did not prefer their children to be burdened by academic learning pressure and they favoured the development of their children's socio-emotional development and practical life skills. They also wanted their children to feel that learning is fun and educating children does not necessarily have to be conducted in a formal way. Parents from this category were rare, only 6 out of 30 parents. Two of them sent their children to private pre-schools, two from NGO pre-schools while two others, had their child in a university-based or religious-based pre-school. No parents from government-based pre-school advocated this view.

The second category refers to parents who were actually concerned about their children's social and moral development but they gave academic achievement a higher priority. In relation to classroom practice, they received play at least one of the following criteria:

- Only for amusement, involving play fighting, running here and there and then exhausted. Play was perceived as 'disruptive behaviour' in classroom learning.
- Typical type of play written as 'subject' in the timetable such as 'physical exercise activity or sports', 'playing with computers' and 'art and craft'.
- Accepted only 'academic play' or educational games not other kind of play
- Play should occur for a limited time
- Should be balance between 'time to play' and 'time to learn' or reduce time to play
- Play only during snack and drink time and before or after a formal learning period
- Play 'in passing' while learning

It might be speculated that the view from the second category was held because parents lacked knowledge or had limited information regarding the importance and the benefits of play as the foundation for children's learning in classroom practice. Something to ponder upon is that there seemed no difference between the views of working class and educated parents.

There seems to be a causal relationship between teachers' actions and parents' beliefs that play in pre-school is not preferable. First, the way the teachers allocated play in teaching did not 'promote' parents to feel that play is the best approach in

teaching. The most important issue here is that if the teachers were not really convinced of the value of play activity how could then they convince parents and explain to them that children are learning through playing?

The second reason related to the evidence from the study conducted by Hewitt and Malony (2000) whereby the competitive orientations of Malaysian society are clearly reflected in parents' actualised perception of pre-school education. Malaysian society wants assurance of the academic success of their children. As pointed out by Klugman and Smilansky (1990, p.250):

“Academic success is equated with being a “successful individual” and, in turn, becoming successful in the market place. Simultaneously, a strong assumption is made that the earlier children can be introduced to the realm of academics the better it will be, both for the individual and for the community”

What also emerges clearly from the results was that the vast majority of parents viewed pre-school as basic preparation prior to statutory schooling whereby the children could develop their basic academic skills as well as learning to socialise with people. In terms of expectation of pre-schools, nearly two third of the interviewed parents prize academic competence and performance for their children as the main consideration. When the preference of pre-school learning is put on 3R performance, it means that the play element may be put aside in the learning session. To this point of view, it supported evidence from the studies conducted by Rohaty (1984), Ling Chu Poh (1988b) and, Hewitt and Maloney (2000).

8.1.4 Administrators' and Children's Point of View

The interview results with pre-school administrators underscore the fact that they have different perceptions and interpretations toward how play could be translated in classroom practice. The same as teachers, even though the vast majority of the administrators believed that children learn something when they play, and perceived play as an appropriate approach in teaching young children, however, in terms of implementation they apparently have many versions of understanding.

Perhaps because of differences in understanding the concept, many administrators also view LTP as 'playing in passing while learning'. Some administrators in this study also confirmed that their setting practised work then play or play as a reward after doing work.

There seem to be similarities between teachers' and administrators' arguments if play was going to be incorporated into daily teaching. The vast majority of administrators viewed play as at least one of these features: 1) in limited time, 2) academic play concept or subject-based play, 3) teacher-led play, 4) balance between time to play and time to learn (play as alternate activity or time-filler), 5) more suitable for under 6 years old children. It seems that the way they perceived play to be allocated in classroom context was different from that advocated and practised by experts in early years education such as Sharp and Manning (1977), Moyles (1989), Bruce (1991), Tassoni and Hucker (2000).

In other respects, many of the administrators argued that the ‘insufficient condition of play environment’ in their pre-schools ‘appeared’ as a result of laissez-faire top management policy towards pre-school education and the community pressure for academic progress coming particularly from parents and primary school teachers.

Meanwhile, results from the children’s point of view provide evidence that they like to go to school primarily because of peer play and, implicitly, that the formal learning environment pressured them. The children were found to be ‘tired’ and ‘bored’ of sitting still listening to ‘lectures’ or doing work instructed by teachers. According to Evans (2002), too much sitting down to formal activities is harmful to the future physical health and well being of children especially under seven years old.

8.1.5 Factors that Contribute to the Difficulty of Deploying Play in Classroom Practice

With reference to answering of the fifth research question, Kagan (1990) in analysing the problems of translating play from theory to practice identified three main barriers: attitudinal barriers, structural barriers and functional barriers. Results from the present study demonstrate that mainly there were four main factors concluded as impeding the progress of deploying play in Malaysian pre-school practice. These barriers include a conceptual barrier in addition to the three other barriers those advocated by Kagan (1990).

The conceptual barrier identified in this study refers to the issue of 'construct validity' in constructing the real meaning of 'teaching and learning through play' when translated into classroom practice. Different interpretations may put play as undervalued activities. If 'Learning Through Play' has become one of the principles in pre-school settings and in curriculum planning, it needs to be made clear to all who work with young children, so that everyone could share the same meaning of LTP in classroom practice (Lally, 1995). As also stated by Moyles (1989), those involved in working with young children should investigate and establish to their satisfaction what is meant by play especially when it is related to the teaching approach.

The phrase 'Learning Through Play' was translated into Malay Language as 'Bermain Sambil Belajar'. Because the phrase was translated from English to Malay, it is nature that the teachers or administrators would have different interpretation regarding the meaning. In this study, teachers and even administrators throughout the interviews typically perceived it as 'playing (in passing) while learning'. There was, therefore, a possible confusion and semantic difference in interpreting the phrase. The word 'through' which was supposed to be translated as 'melalui' was translated as 'sambil' which can mean 'doing something in passing'. Instead of perceiving that children will 'learn something while playing' (EPRD, MOE & UNICEF, 1996), majority of the teachers especially from the second category previously mentioned, perceived the validity of LTP as 'playing something while learning'.

Consequently, play is perceived as 'doing simple, fun, short interval activity within a formal learning' and NOT as 'learning something through the play' or the play is the

medium for learning. It is not surprising, therefore, many teachers in this study put the main purpose of allocating play in the classroom was to attract children's interest or to avoid boredom of formal lessons. If the children could sit still and be well behaved without showing off their 'bored' condition through disruptive behaviour, some of the teachers acknowledged that they might not implement play!

If we choose the definition as defined by Rubin et al (1983), Moyles (1989), Bruce (1991), Tassoni and Hucker's features of true play and Macintyre (2001), this kind of play that is practised in the Malaysian pre-school is not considered as providing the context for meaningful play experience. Even though the teachers did allow children to act out songs or 'one minute body movement' within formal learning this does not seem to permit them to engage in activities where they are intrinsically motivated (Rubin et al, 1983) and self-initiated (Bennett et al, 1997).

One implication of believing that play could be deployed as 'play by passing while learning', is that play corners would not be needed in the vast majority of pre-school classrooms. What they have - as stated by the teachers - is subject corners displaying teachers' rather than children's work. This is indeed not in line with what proposed and agreed by many practitioners and experts in the area (Almy et al, 1984; Curtis, 1986; EYCG, 1992; and DFEE, 1990). Moyles (1989) for example, argued that play is always structured by the environment, the materials or contexts in which play takes place. The teachers in this study practised such kind of play that could be questionable in terms of its real meaningful context of play.

In relation to the meaning construct of play, if we refer back to the Malaysian pre-school curriculum (1988) and (2002), there was no explanation of how play was supposed to be implemented in classroom practice or to be deployed as the foundation for pre-school learning. There is no 'stepping stones' guideline explaining examples of how play could be practised in teaching and how such kind of play contributes to various aspects of child development. As was stated by Rohaty (1986), the development of children's learning and teaching style in Malaysian pre-school always referred as depending on the creativity or tactics of the teacher. The teachers and administrators involved in this study even acknowledged this problem.

Meanwhile, the attitudinal barriers in the Malaysian context refer to the belief it is valueless. There is denigration of the place of play in child education and concerning whether play could support children acquiring certain skills for achieving the required academic performance. As stated by Loughrey (2000) many believe that real academic learning occurs only within a formal curriculum and that schools should provide this formal environment.

Orientation towards an examination-based system was actually the most influential factor. In the majority of settings teachers were pressured to promote literacy and numeracy in order to fulfil the demands of the curriculum and obtain reliable evidence of learning. When expanding this issue, many teachers, administrators and even the policy maker viewed that the main constraint is parental pressure on academic achievement especially reading ability. However, the differences in parents' and teachers' views, which these findings reveal, are striking. Parents, on the other hand, stated that this is the demand of the society whereas higher academic

achievement becomes a value judgement of the 'brightness' of a particular child. So, they wanted their children not to be left behind and seen as 'less able'. It is interesting then, to speculate on the reasons for these differing perceptions.

With reference to the structural barriers, there is no doubt that in many settings too little space and inadequate play materials or resources for both indoors and outdoors environment caused a great problem. This is in line with the findings concluded in Siti Zaliha's study (1999). In addition, there were also problems with the structure of the school timetable, an 'overloaded' syllabus and inappropriate staff: child ratio.

Finally, as concluded beforehand, the majority of teachers' and even administrators' understanding of the concept of play in relation to children's learning was not in line with professionals and experts in this area. This issue leads into the problem of a functional barrier. The teachers interviewed may have lack of knowledge due to low qualifications and lacking opportunities for professional training.

8.1.6 Integration and Triangulation of Findings

Frequently, qualitative study employs a combination of data and methodological triangulation. Some argue that the inclusion of multiple sources in the form of triangulated data may be viewed as providing only additional information, whereas others argue triangulation is important in the pursuit of more accurate information (Robson, 1999).

With reference to differences and similarities between data sets, in this study the results from the empirical chapter of observational data were used to validate or corroborate the message obtained in the interviews with teachers, administrators, parents, children and even the policy maker regarding issues of the implementation of learning through play in classroom practice. This second method usefully complemented information obtained by the first method that was the interview. For example, in examining current teaching style, many teachers in this study explained through interview that they teach through play, whereas the observation provided findings that there are discrepancies or differences between what teachers say that they have done regarding 'teaching through play', and what they actually did in classroom practice. The triangulated method also provides richer evidence for certain queries. For example, the teachers' understanding of the concept of 'teaching through play' as explained by them during interview could be examined through observation in terms how they allocated children's play and whether they really put it in 'the meaningful context' when they translated their belief in classroom practice.

Triangulated data provides a means of testing one source of information against other sources, as argued by Robson (1999). Findings from this study revealed that some information from the different datasets gave the same messages and they cross-validated each other while some sources from these different empirical datasets provided a discrepancy. So the data triangulation does help in the quest for rich data that attempts to reduce some aspects of bias or inaccuracy that may occur if only one data source is used.

Analysis of the interviewing data had indicated that there was a background of mistrust about play which exists in the minds of so many of the teachers, parents and even pre-school administrators in Malaysia. The vast majority of them are of the same view, accepting play as appropriate only if it is deployed in classroom practice in a form of academic play.

As we can see through the main findings, parents view play as leisure and are content to substitute play as 'wasting' the time of learning. So for them, teachers' responsibility is to limit play in favour of more serious working or formal learning. This is the type of education parents feel their children require to meet the needs of Malaysian society. In line with this view, the pre-school educators, the majority of whom lacked opportunity to be trained in child development and education courses, believed that adult-directed recreation and sports for extra curricular activities are proper alternatives to play in classroom context. Many of the educational administrators also view play as an obstruction to academic learning and enact legislation to reduce school time for play. These administrators as well as the educators typically receive little or no training about play.

Consequently, these perceptions toward play influenced the children. Responses from the children revealed that they distinguish 'play' from 'learning' and probably they are developing the concepts of 'play' and 'learning' from the way in which parents and teachers use these terms in conversation with them. For the children, coming to school is to learn and not to play, as they were informed or instructed by their parents and teachers. In other words the children seem to deny their access to fun learning because their parents and teachers have not been able to understand the

meaning of learning through play. This situation is contradictory to a child's right and needs. Towards the end of the interviews many of the children expressed their actual feelings and stated that they want to play and enjoy in school but they are pressured by the demands of parents and teachers which are pressured by the demands of the society and education system!

In other respects, some of the findings from the triangulated data revealed that there was no partnership between parents and teachers or administrators in practice. The differences in parents' and teachers' views which these findings reveal are striking. It is crucial that parents are involved in their children's education. Parents have a critical role to play in pushing for such changes. However, some of the parents view that many teachers see this as a challenge to their professionalism and are concerned about the impact on how they operate in the classroom. As a result, some parents did not know about their children's pre-school curriculum and were not aware of methods used by the teachers to educate their child. Some of them even felt that their roles are to raise up their children while education in school is fully the responsibility of the teachers. Some teachers blamed parents and there is an element of pressure faced by teachers regarding parents' preference of pre-school teaching and learning activities. These doubts about parents are also apparent from many of the administrators interviewed. This confusion over what is probably a minor issue may disguise a larger area of mistrust between teachers and parents. This issue needs to be resolved and there might be urgent and crucial needs to improve the quality of the whole area of home-school links.

8.2 Implications of the Study

This thesis questions the need for rethinking the practice in Malaysian pre-school settings regarding awareness and knowledge of the existing patterns of teachers' and parents' understanding of the concept of play in relation to children's learning. As stated by Klugman and Smilansky (1990) there is a great need for more conscious advocacy work in support of children's play in actual practice.

The results from this study may prove useful for the planners and administrators of pre-school in developing policies, designing programs and managing settings. This is in anticipation of the future role of the Malaysian government in pre-school education whereby presently there is a need for co-ordination between agencies in terms of curriculum planning, teacher training and provision of play in pre-school practice.

Firstly, findings from this study showed a clear manifestation of the formal method involved in teaching young children and the focusing on academic skills development rather than other crucial aspects of child development that needs to be enhanced and improved. The pressure for academic learning that communities put on pre-schools and even children needs to be recognised and addressed.

One implication of this study is that effort must be made to assist teachers, parents and administrators as well as policy makers to work collaboratively in the process of giving play its central role in children's learning programs and granting pre-school children their right to play and be free from academic pressure. To acknowledge the

importance of play is not to deny and undervalue other educational aims such as literacy and numeracy. Educators should have many concerns in facilitating the holistic development of children in order to produce ‘a balanced human being’ as advocated in the Malaysian National Education Philosophy.

The government of Malaysia, specifically the MOE, need to expend a great effort to call upon experts in child development and education to sit together and discuss ways of implementing the curriculum that suits children’s needs, especially through play. They could produce guidelines for pre-school teachers and administrators in teaching young children. Educated parents could also be determined to participate in decision about their children experience in pre-school programs.

Play should surely have a honourable part in the National Pre-school curriculum. The new curriculum (CDC, 2002) could be used to support planning by setting the context to maximise the opportunities for developing the resources and materials, the settings and the people who are working with young children and managing settings for children’s learning. The quality of children’s play and learning depends on attitudes, time, space, materials, and the quality of pre-school educators.

The Ministry of Education and agencies involved in the development of pre-school education in Malaysia should organise more workshops and professional training programs for the purpose of implementing play in pre-school practice. Through the workshops and seminar discussions, pre-school educators and administrators would be exposed to an appropriate environment suitable for children’s needs and their development. Indeed, the teachers’ understanding of the crucial role of play in

children's learning could be a powerful argument for the justification of play in the early childhood curriculum and in classroom practice.

Parents also should be given opportunity of developing their knowledge regarding child development and parenting skills. As suggested by Rohaty (1984) parents' education should be compulsory component of any pre-school program. Pre-school teachers need to be stimulated and experts need to work together in finding methods which would lead to a more elaborate play amongst the children, to prolong it and make it interesting. Also, as suggested by Klugman (1990), the administrators responsible for pre-school should have at least a minimum level of preparation and experience in the field. This is one of the ways that we could listen to children's voices and fulfilling their needs.

Above all, the budget for the sake of child development in Malaysia should be expanded and put as a main consideration, only then will it be possible to provide quality for future early childhood education programs.

8.3 Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to which the findings of the study are subjected:

- 1) The study was confined to teachers and parents of several determined rural and urban areas of the state of Selangor and Kedah. The present data do not provide information on the teachers' and parents' views from the whole state of Malaysia. No intention also was made to obtain data according the full range of differences between rural and urban areas.

- 2) A truly random sample of parents could not be obtained for the interviewing procedure. The majority of the parents interviewed were selected by the administrator of each particular setting to be involved in the study.
- 3) The observation involved in this study was undertaken for only one day for each of the 15 settings. Long-term observation is needed for more precise results.
- 4) With regard to the instruments, interview questions and observation schedules were developed by the researcher and content validated by practitioners in early years education and tested through the pilot study. The instruments may, however have excluded important points regarding play in relation to children's learning and development.
- 5) The Islamic perspective on play in this study has been presented in a swift and synoptic way of explanation due to time constraints. Only few Muslim scholars' views have been represented as a reference for Islamic notions and no elaboration was made on the general topic of child development and education from the Islamic perspective. Therefore, the reference to the Islamic point of view regarding the topic has not been presented in a comprehensive way.
- 6) The relevant ethical issue concerned the researcher's values regarding the usefulness of play as a pedagogical tool or foundation for learning. So it is possible that the researcher's belief could influence the research. However, this potential problem was addressed by the objective evidence of the interviews (eg. transcripts) which were read by some lecturers in the International Islamic University Malaysia, and by discussion with my

supervisor. However, no formed inter-rater reliability check was undertaken. This should be carried out in future work.

8.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The following studies are suggestions for future research specifically in the Malaysian context:

1. A repetition of the study but primarily concerned with using observation as the main method of data collection, aiming towards improving the representativeness of the sample to be studied and the length of observation.
2. An experimental study to explore whether there are significant differences in terms of intellectual and creative development between groups of children given opportunities to learn through play and those taught by a formal way of teaching.
3. A study of pre-school teachers' and administrators' knowledge in child development may be important to provide information for the evaluation of training syllabus for pre-school educators.
4. An intervention study to assist the process of educational change from a traditional method of learning to a play-based activity. The intention could be to support practitioners in questioning and evaluating their current practices and enhance their knowledge and understanding of play in relation to children's learning and development.

8.5 Conclusion

This study has identified a number of dilemmas which are reflected in the wider discourse within early childhood education, and has raised questions about the value and relevance of the didactic and rote learning that gives the impression of ‘meaningful learning’. Adults’ attitudes to children’s play, the way they handle it and the interest in how and what children play is as vital as organisational and professional solutions.

Basically, the issues raised in this study reflect on the Malaysian Education System, which is exam-oriented stressing academic monitoring, producing a sense of pressure, of ‘chasing’ a high level of academic achievement. Unfortunately, while rushing to achieving the target, society forgot that children are unique in terms of their development. Educating young children by focusing on academic pressure could cause negative effects to their later development and, significantly, there would be no balance in terms of their various aspects of development.

Even though some people want the academic skills of primary school to be taught in pre-school, research carried out in the USA and in the UK is that ‘the pressure cooker approach’ or the ‘academic pre-school’ does not work (David, 1996:93). A recent report by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) warns that teaching more formal skills from an early age could lead to increased anxiety and have a negative impact on their self-esteem and motivation to learn (Rawstrone, 2002). In addition, the ‘Desirable Learning Outcomes’ curriculum in England was

subject by criticism and no more in use today because of pressure onto an early formal learning roles (Mastura, 2000). Why don't we learn from comparing?

If the Malaysian Muslim government is informed by religious belief, they should be aware that play is valued and acknowledged in Islamic law. One of the most quoted sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the following; “ *Play with your children for seven years, discipline them for seven years, and befriend them for seven years*” (www.ibnkhaldun.org/comissioned/children/children3-4.html) Play then is not only a source of joy and fun but also the heart of children's learning.

This is the time when we need to listen to the voice of children in Malaysia. Perhaps traditional parenting which suggests: “You children, you keep quiet, you know nothing!” should be reviewed. Children need to be respected as well as anybody in the whole world. Children are an asset to our nation, so, in order to ensure their holistic development, they need to be educated in an appropriate environment, suitable to their needs and uniqueness.

In this millennium, research on the brain as well as in other areas of study (Bruce, 1999) provides clear evidence that children need to play. What children, especially under 7 years need is time to play, mature and develop their intellectual skills by learning a wide variety of opportunities and experiences. This can be achieved through play if this forms the foundation for learning. Above all, our children need to have time to be the young children as they are and never will be again. Pity them if they were stressed for academic pressure!

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Appendices



Interview for Pre-school Teachers, Parents and Administrators

Name of Interviewee:
(Confidential)

Time:

Date:

Place:

Position: Teacher/ parent/ head teacher/ manager/ principal/ coordinator

Type of Pre-school:

Name and address of pre-school:

Brief description of surrounding:

[i.e. city centre, urban area, rural area, suburbs, industrial estate etc.]

***The interview questions follow will be used during interview session.
However, whatever necessary, the interviewee will be asked to provide
reasons for their answers.***

Appendix A

Interview Questions for Teachers

I am interested in finding out how you see play as appropriate approach in teaching young children or how you see play as the way of children's learning.

(Saya berminat untuk mengenal pasti dan mengetahui bagaimana anda faham 'bermain' sebagai satu pendekatan yang paling sesuai dalam memberi pendidikan kepada kanak-kanak atau dalam ertikata lain, pandangan anda tentang konsep 'main' sebagai cara utama kanak-kanak mempelajari sesuatu).

1. Could you please tell me first of all about your current teaching style?
(Pertama-tamanya bolehkah anda beritahu tentang cara gaya pengajaran anda sekarang?)
 - type of activities
(jenis-jenis aktiviti)
 - grouping of children
(kumpulan kanak-kanak)
 - learning styles of children
(gaya pembelajaran kanak-kanak)
2. How do you organise the classroom?
(Bagaimanakah anda menguruskan kelas?)
 - structure of the learning programme of the classroom
(struktur program pembelajaran dalam kelas)
 - time-table
(jadual waktu)
 - physical lay out (arrangement of tables/chairs and provision of play if any)
(ruang fizikal (susunan meja/kerusi dan ruangan untuk main jika ada)
 - How do you feel about the appropriateness of your current teaching style and organisation for children learning? Why?
(Bagaimana anda rasakan tentang kesesuaian cara gaya pengajaran anda sekarang dengan pengurusan anda bagi membolehkan kanak-kanak belajar? Kenapa?)
3. How do you feel about the curriculum content and process of this particular type of pre-school?
(Bagaimanakah pandangan anda mengenai pengisian dan proses kurikulum di prasekolah ini? Apakah yang anda rasakan?)
 - Is it fulfils the needs of child development?
(adakah ia memenuhi keperluan perkembangan kanak-kanak?)

- How do you set about resolving the inevitable conflicts of matching curriculum to children needs?
(Bagaimanakah anda menyelesaikan konflik penyesuaian kurikulum dengan keperluan kanak-kanak?)
 - Is there any mention of play in the curriculum guidelines?
(Adakah (garis panduan kurikulum sekolah ini) menyentuh atau menyebut apa-apa tentang konsep bermain?)
 - Is there any guide on how to use play in teaching?
(Adakah terdapat garis panduan/bimbingan tentang tata cara melaksanakan pendekatan bermain dalam pengajaran?)
 - Do you feel that the advent of your pre-school curriculum will lead to the loss of that time if it will be used for play?
(Adakah anda merasakan perlaksanaan kurikulum yang dikemukakan dalam bentuk main hanya akan membuang dan menghabiskan masa?)
4. Do you have a particular philosophy regarding the education of pre-school children? *Now, I would like to ask you:* what is your construct of play? What do you mean by play for children?
(Adakah anda mempunyai falsafah tersendiri tentang pendidikan kanak-kanak pra-sekolah? Sekarang, saya ingin bertanya: Apakah yang anda faham tentang 'bermain'? Apakah definisi/ maksud bermain bagi kanak-kanak mengikut pandangan anda?)
- Value/role of play: enjoyment, recreation, educational?
(Nilai/ peranan bermain : keseronokan, rekreasi, pendidikan?)
5. Can you explain how play contributes to child development?
(Bolehkah anda jelaskan bagaimanakah bermain memberi sumbangan kepada perkembangan kanak-kanak?)
- What aspects of child development do you think are helped through play?
(Apakah aspek perkembangan kanak-kanak yang anda fikir dapat dibantu (ditingkatkan) dengan cara kanak-kanak itu bermain?)
 - Does it develop cognitive – physical- emotional – social skills?
(Adakah ia membantu perkembangan kemahiran kognitif – fizikal – emosi – social?)
 - What purpose do you use play for?
(Apakah tujuan anda menggunakan pendekatan bermain?)
6. How/what do you think children learn through play?
(Bagaimanakah kanak-kanak belajar melalui bermain? Apakah yang dipelajari oleh kanak-kanak melalui bermain?)
- How can you tell?
(Bagaimanakah anda hendak jelaskan?)
 - How do you know?
(Bagaimanakah anda tahu?)

- Some people say play is valuable and very important and some say children are wasting their time in pre-school by playing when they should be learning /working. How do you say this?
(Ada sesetengah orang kata bermain ni satu pendekatan yang cukup berharga dan amat penting dan ada pula yang kata kanak-kanak hanya akan membuang masa bila dia bermain sedangkan sepatutnya dia kena belajar atau buat kerja. Bagaimanakah pula pandangan anda tentang hal ini?)
7. How often do you make provision for learning through play in your classroom?
(Berapa kalikah kekerapan anda dalam memberikan pendekatan belajar melalui bermain dalam bilik darjah ?)
- How frequent? Everyday – Seldom – rarely – never
(Sekerap mana? Tiap-tiap hari – kadang-kadang – jarang-jarang sekali – tidak pernah).
 - Example of type of play organised in the classroom?
(Bolehkah anda berikan contoh pendekatan belajar melalui bermain yang pernah anda uruskan dalam kelas?)
8. How confident are you about using play? What, in your view, distinguishes play from other activities/ task?
(Sejauh manakah keyakinan anda dalam melaksanakan pendekatan bermain? Pada pandangan anda, apakah yang membezakan antara bermain dengan lain-lain aktiviti atau gerakerja?)
- Do you feel you are able to implement it in your classroom?
(Adakah anda rasa anda mampu melaksanakan pendekatan ini dalam bilik darjah?)
 - If a parent ask you why her 5/6 years old has ‘played’ all day, what is your response honestly? Can you justify the child’s play to the parents’ objectivity?
(Jika sekiranya ada ibu bapa yang bertanya mengapakah anak mereka yang berusia 5/6 tahun asyik bermain sahaja sepanjang hari, apakah reaksi sebenar anda? Mampukah anda memberikan penjelasan yang kukuh kepada ibu bapa tentang pertautan kanak-kanak dengan bermain?)
9. Do you think you are interested in and willing to implement play in your classroom?
(Adakah anda rasa benar-benar berminat dan berazam untuk melaksanakan pendekatan bermain dalam pengajaran anda di bilik darjah?)
- If yes, what are the problems do you think will face you in implementing it?
If no, please state why?
(Sekiranya ya, apakah masalah yang mungkin anda akan hadapi dalam melaksanakan pendekatan ini? Jika tidak, tolong jelaskan mengapa?)
 - Oppose the needs of parents?
(Bertentangan dengan kehendak ibubapa)

- Do not have knowledge?
(Tiada pengetahuan tentangnya)
- There is no such value of teaching through play? Play is only for enjoyment.
(Tiada apa-apa nilai mengajar menggunakan pendekatan ini. (Bagi saya) main tu hanya untuk keseronokan semata-mata.)
- Just wasting time? / Lack of time to implement it /‘over load’ syllabus.
(Ia hanya membuang masa/ tidak cukup masa untuk laksanakan/ sukatan pelajaran banyak sangat)
- Resources/ materials are not available?
(Sumber/peralatan tidak ada/tidak cukup)
- Prefer to teach in a formal way? (Used to it)
(Lebih suka mengajar cara formal sebab sudah biasa dengan cara tu)
- Play did not meet the particular pre-school philosophy/ prospectus?
(Bermain tidak sesuai dengan falsafah atau prospektus tersendiri tadika ini)

10. How long is your experience as pre-school educator?

(Berapa lamakah pengalaman anda sebagai guru tadika?)

- Length of time teaching, in present school, teaching pre-school children
(Jangka masa pengalaman mengajar (secara keseluruhan) di sekolah sekarang, mengajar kanak-kanak pra-sekolah.)
- Qualification & training
(Kelayakan dan Latihan/kursus)
- Socio-economic background of parents/pre-school children
(Latar belakang sosial dan ekonomi ibu bapa/kanak-kanak yang diajar)

11. Would you like (further) training for the purpose of implementing play in classroom practice?

(Adakah anda berminat untuk mendapat latihan (/latihan lanjut) yang bertujuan untuk melaksanakan pendekatan bermain dalam pengajaran di bilik darjah?)

- Can you suggest ways of how play can be effectively incorporated into pre-school teachers daily teaching?
(Bolehkah anda beri cadangan bagaimanakah pendekatan bermain boleh dilaksanakan lebih efektif dalam pengajaran harian.)

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Parents

1. First of all, may I know what is your understanding of early childhood education?
(Pertama-tamanya, bolehkah saya tahu, apakah yang anda faham tentang pendidikan awal kanak-kanak?)
What are the main purposes of sending your child to pre-school?
(Apakah tujuan utama anda menghantar anak ke tadika (pra-sekolah)?)
2. Why did you send your child into this particular type of pre-school?
(Kenapa anda menghantar anak anda ke tadika jenis ini?)
 - Does your child have a brother/sister?
(Adakah anak anda mempunyai abang/ kakak?)
 - Were they were being sent too into this particular type of pre-school?
(Adakah mereka juga dihantar ke tadika yang sama?)
 - Why?
(Kenapa?)
 - What is your expectation from the pre-school?
(Apakah harapan (expectation) anda terhadap tadika ini?)
3. Have you ever read the content of this particular type of pre-school curriculum?
(Pernahkah anda membaca isi kandungan kurikulum sekolah ini?)
What do you feel about it?
(Apa pandangan anda?)
 - What is interesting about it?
(Apa yang menarik tentang kurikulum tersebut?)
 - Does your child's pre-school provide your child with a good range of play-based activities? (Indoors and outdoors)
(Adakah tadika tempat anak anda belajar menyediakan ruangan untuk aktiviti yang berteraskan konsep bermain (Aktiviti bermain di luar dan dalam bilik darjah)
 - Can you give me some example of it?
(Bolehkah anda berikan contoh?)
 - Can you tell me about the method of how the school educate your children?
(Bolehkah anda beritahu saya mengenai kaedah atau cara bagaimana pra-sekolah ini mendidik anak anda?)
 - Have you ever asked your children what they learn or do in school?
(Pernahkah anda bertanya anak anda apakah yang mereka pelajari atau buat di sekolah?)

4. What do you understand the word 'play' means in children's world?
(Apakah yang anda faham tentang perkataan 'main' dalam dunia kanak-kanak?)
- Value, role, purpose
(nilai, peranan, tujuan)
 - How do you define play?
(Apa definisi main pada pandangan anda?)
 - Have you ever playing with your child? Are you aware that your children learn something when you play with them?
(Pernahkah anda bermain dengan anak anda? Adakah anda menyedari yang anak anda mempelajari sesuatu bila anda bermain dengannya?)
5. As a parent, what/how do you think of children learning through play (in general/ out of classroom)?
(Sebagai ibu bapa, apakah / bagaimanakah anda boleh fikirkan yang kanak-kanak itu belajar melalui bermain? (secara umum/ luar dari bilik darjah))
- Can you give me an example of it?
(Bolehkah anda berikan contoh?)
 - How can your child develop his/her intelligence skills through play?
(Bagaimana agaknya kanak-kanak boleh mengembangkan daya kemahiran inteletiknya melalui bermain?)
 - Do you think your child can improve their academic achievement through play?
(Adakah anda fikir kanak-kanak juga boleh meningkatkan pencapaian akademiknya melalui bermain?)
6. What do you think about play in the pre-school classroom?
(Bagaimanakah pula pandangan anda mengenai bermain dalam kelas pra-sekolah?)
- Is it appropriate?
(Adakah ianya bersesuaian?)
 - What are the differences between play at home and play at school?
(Apakah perbezaan antara bermain di rumah dengan bermain di sekolah?)
 - Do you think that we should reduce or increase play activities in the classroom?
(Adakah anda fikir kita patut menambah aktiviti yang berteraskan konsep bermain dalam kelas pra-sekolah atau mengurangkannya ? (melebihi pefokusan kepada aktiviti yang berteraskan akademik))

7. Can you give your opinion if I suggest that we should cover all elements of the pre-school curriculum through play?

(Sekiranya saya memberi cadangan bahawa kita patut merangkum semua elemen dalam kurikulum pra-sekolah berteraskan kepada konsep belajar melalui main, apakah pandangan anda?)

- Either agree or not, please state reasons.

(Samada setuju atau tidak, tolong nyatakan alasan dan sebab mengapa anda berpendapat demikian.)

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Administrators

(Head Teachers/Principals/Coordinators/Managers)

1. First of all, I would like to get some background information about your pre-school
(Pertama-tamanya saya ingin mendapatkan maklumat mengenai latar belakang pra-sekolah di bawah pengurusan anda)
 - Type of accommodation (own premise, village house, sharing with primary school etc.)
Jenis Bangunan (dimiliki sendiri, rumah kampung, berkongsi dengan sekolah rendah etc.)
 - School session
(Sessi persekolahan)
 - Number of classes, size, staff: child ratio
(Bilangan kelas, saiz, jumlah murid, nisbah guru: murid)
 - Number of teachers/ assistant and their qualification/ training
(Bilangan guru/ pembantu guru dan kelayakan mereka/ kursus latihan yang pernah dihadiri)
 - Financial provision
(Sumber kewangan)
2. Do you have a particular philosophy regarding the education of pre-school children? What are the main philosophy / principles of your pre-school and how were they decided upon?
(Adakah anda mempunyai falsafah atau prinsip tertentu mengenai pendidikan anak-anak pra-sekolah? Apakah falsafah / pegangan utama pra-sekolah anda dan bagaimanakah ianya dibentuk/ dirancang?)
 - Is there any mention about the value or role of play in children's learning?
(Adakah di dalam falsafah tersebut ada disebut mengenai nilai dan peranan bermain dalam pembelajaran kanak-kanak?)
3. Does your school have any curriculum guidelines to be followed in teaching young children?
(Adakah pra-sekolah anda mempunyai garis panduan kurikulum yang perlu diikuti/ dijadikan panduan mengajar kanak-kanak peringkat awal?)
 - How well do you think teachers in your pre-school understand the content of the curriculum and know how it is going to be carried out?
(Adakah anda rasa guru-guru di tadika anda / bawah penyeliaan anda benar-benar memahami isi kandungan kurikulum dan tahu bagaimana ianya perlu dilaksanakan?)
 - Do you have a printed statement for parents about your pre-school curriculum?

(Adakah anda mempunyai kenyataan bertulis mengenai kurikulum pra-sekolah anda yang diagihkan kepada ibu bapa?)

4. Could you comment generally on current teaching styles and classroom organisation in pre-school classrooms?

(Bolehkah anda beri komen secara umum tentang gaya pengajaran guru dan pengurusan bilik darjah di pra-sekolah anda?)

- Style of teaching
(Cara/ gaya pengajaran)
- Grouping of children
(Kumpulan kanak-kanak)
- Learning styles of children
(Gaya pembelajaran kanak-kanak)
- Type of activities
(Jenis-jenis aktiviti)
- Physical lay out of the classroom and outdoor play activities
(Bentuk fizikal kelas dan aktiviti permainan luar bilik darjah)

5. In your opinion as a head teacher or co-ordinator (administrator), do you think children's play is important for their development?

(Mengikut pandangan anda sebagai guru besar atau penyelia (pentadbir) pra sekolah, adakah anda fikir bermain adalah penting bagi perkembangan kanak-kanak?)

- to what extent?
(sejauh manakah kepentingannya?)
- Should play be an integral part of pre-school program?
(Perluakah bermain dijadikan sebagai sebahagian dari program atau pengisian pra sekolah?)

6. Actually, what do you understand by the word play personally?

(Secara peribadi, apakah sebenarnya yang anda faham tentang perkataan main/ bermain ?)

- Value, role, purpose
(Nilai, peranan, tujuan)
- What is your own view of play in relation to children's learning?
(Apakah pandangan anda tentang bermain bila dikaitkan dengan pembelajaran kanak-kanak?)
- Do you think play is the appropriate way in teaching young children?
(Adakah anda rasa bermain itu satu pendekatan yang paling sesuai dalam mengajar kanak-kanak?)

7. How long have you been as head teacher/administrator? Would you like to have play to be incorporated in your particular pre-school classrooms?

(Sudah berapa lamakah anda bertugas sebagai pentadbir/ penyelia pra-sekolah? Adakah anda mahu supaya bermain itu dijalinkan dalaam kurikulum pra-sekolah anda?)

- If yes, has your school taken any step to prepare for the appropriate play environment for young children? What step has been taken?
(Jika ya, bolehkah anda beritahu adakah pihak sekolah telah mengambil apa-apa langkah ke arah menyediakan 'persekitaran bermain' yang sesuai untuk kanak-kanak peringkat awal perkembangan? Apakah antara langkah-langkah yang telah diambil?)
 - If no, why? Can you state the reason?
(Jika tidak, mengapa? Boleh anda jelaskan sebabnya?)
8. Do you have any suggestion of how play can suit your pre-school principles in the aspect of implementation?
(Adakah anda mempunyai apa-apa cadangan bagaimanakah konsep bermain ini boleh disesuaikan dengan prinsip/ pegangan utama pra-sekolah anda dari aspek perlaksanaan?)
9. Finally, I would like to know what is your vision of this kindergarten.
(Sebagai mengakhiri perbualan ini, suka saya tanyakan apakah visi anda mengenai sekolah ini?)

Appendix D

Interview Questions for Children

1. What is your feeling when you go to pre-school? Why?
(Apakah perasaan adik bila pergi ke sekolah? Kenapa?)
2. What are you doing in the classroom? What does the teacher do?
(Apakah yang adik buat dalam bilik darjah? Apa yang cikgu buat?)
 - Can you tell me about that?
(Bolehkah adik cerita sedikit apa yang berlaku dalam bilik darjah?)
 - Do you play in the classroom?/ Have you ever play in the classroom?
(Adakah adik bermain dalam kelas? Pernahkah adik bermain dalam kelas?)
3. What would you like to be there in the classroom when you are learning?
(Apa yang adik suka ada dalam bilik darjah bila adik belajar?)

Appendix E

Interview for Policy Maker (Minister of Education)

1. What is the main philosophy or goal guiding the form of early childhood programme in Malaysia?
 - Are there particular people (eg. theorists), disciplines, experiences, or events, which have strongly influenced early childhood practice?
2. Generally, what is your view about the quality link between play and learning?
 - What is your opinion about implementing learning through play approach in pre-school classroom?
 - To what extent have play materials been provided for government-funded pre-school?
3. I read from news that there is a new national pre-school curriculum. Are you satisfied with present development?
 - To what extent will the content of the new curriculum fulfil the need of child development.
 - Is this curriculum has something to do with learning through play approach?
 - How can teachers practice this notion?
 - Why are pre-school children in Malaysia usually being taught in a formal way?
4. What attempts have so far been made to improve pre-school teachers professionalism?
 - Do you think that pre-school teachers in Malaysia have appropriate training and continuing professional development? Why?
 - Why did the government terminate the Diploma for pre-school teacher education programme?
5. What are the problems facing the Ministry of Education in implementing the new pre-school curriculum to the whole type of pre-school?
 - What attempts have so far been made to design a 'good role-model' of government-funded pre-school?

6. Is the government planning other development in addition to the new pre-school curriculum? What efforts have so far been taken by the government?
- Concerning the financing/funding, what are some estimates for providing early childhood education services to all families who wish to enrol their children?
 - Do you think that the budget for early years education should be expanded? Why?
7. At the end, what is your vision of early childhood education in Malaysia?

Appendix F

Observation Schedules (Category-based System)
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Date of observation:

Type of settings:

Start time:

Finish time:

No. of children present:

No. of adult present:

Time	Teaching Organisation (A)	Non-play Activities (B)	Play Activities (C)	Play context/ Materials used (D)	Play Status (E)	Comments

Appendix G

Example of ‘*Special Form*’ in transferring/
transcribing data from Malay to English

1. Could you please tell me first of all about your current teaching style?

- type of activities :

- grouping of children: _____

- learning styles of children: _____

2. How did you organise the classroom?

- structure of the learning programme of the classroom:

- time-table:

- physical lay out:

- How do you feel about the appropriateness of your current teaching style and organisation for children learning? Why?

3. How do you feel about the curriculum content and process of this particular type of pre-school?

How do you set about resolving the inevitable conflicts of matching curriculum to children needs? _____

- Is there any mention of play in the curriculum guidelines?

- Is there any guide on how to use play in teaching?

- Do you feel that the advent of your pre-school curriculum will lead to the loss of that time if it will be used for play?

4. Do you have a particular philosophy regarding the education of pre-school children?

Now, I would like to ask you: what is your construct of play? What do you mean by play for children?

- Value/role of play: enjoyment, recreation, educational?

5. Can you explain how play contributes to child development?

- What aspects of child development do you think are helped through play?
- Does it develop cognitive – physical- emotional – social skills?

- What purpose do you use play for?

- Some people say play is valuable and very important and some say children are wasting their time in pre-school by playing when they should be learning /working. How do you say this?

6. How often do you make provision for learning through play in your classroom?

- How frequent? Always – Seldom – rarely – never

- Example of type of play organised in the classroom?

7. How confident are you about using play? :

- Do you feel you are able to implement it in your classroom?

- If a parent ask you why her 5/6 years old has ‘played’ all day, what is your response honestly? Can you justify the child’s play to the parents’ objectivity?

8. Do you think you are interested in and willing to implement play in your classroom?

-
- If yes, what are the problems do you think will face you in implementing it?
If no, please state why?
 - Oppose the needs of parents?
 - Does not have knowledge?
 - There is no such value of teaching through play? Play is only for enjoyment.
 - Just wasting time? / Lack of time to implement it 'over load' syllabus.
 - Resources/ materials are not available?
 - Prefer to teach in a formal way? (Used to it)
 - Play did not meet the particular pre-school philosophy/ prospectus?

9. How long is your experience as pre-school educator?

Would you like (further) training for the purpose of implementing play in classroom practice? _____

- Can you suggest ways of how play can be effectively incorporated into pre-school teachers daily teaching?

Appendix H

Example of Summary of Individual Respondent's Data Transcription

T07RD

Q1 CURRENT TEACHING STYLE	Q2 CLASSROOM ORGANISATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Using Instructional Learning Materials and existence thingsExpositionQuestion and answerIntegrated Learning <p>Activity: Whole class activity -Play activity eg. Grocery or Shop House –occasionally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">The activities are still approached mostly individually through scheme workbooks. <p>Grouping Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Age & ability groupings –different classroom and different teacherActivity-based grouping: only for art & craft subject (same as T06 opinion)No group for other subjects- tend to play too much <p>Learning Style:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Some slow and some are good (Usually being trained by parents at home)Like to ask questionsHigh curiosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Time-table prepared by head teacher – teacher implementsAdvance children could continue with advance lessonAssistant helps teacher after cooking taskTables and chairs are limited. Arrangement of table and chairs is like in primary school (formal classroom teaching) <p>Play corner:</p> <p>Outdoor: have large play equipments (playground) in the school yard or run physical exercise</p> <p>Indoor: narrow space and no play corner</p> <p>Appropriateness:</p> <p>Even it is not appropriate it is obliged to say that is appropriate due to the situation and such condition.... have to share the classroom with another user that used it in afternoon session</p> <p>We could not make any change for classroom physical arrangement</p>
Q3 CURRICULUM	Q4 PHILOSOPHY AND PLAY
<ul style="list-style-type: none">I don't know what to say...look upon the parents that sent their children here...for sure they've got to find about the prestige of the school first.... (<i>Accepted by parents</i>)Not really know about children's needs...different child would have different interest... (<i>Cannot fulfil the needs of all children</i>)The subject is not suit to child level <p>Match cur. ↔ child needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Difficult topics/ items – pressure for children and pressure for teacherTeaching step by step – apprenticeshipChild-centred activity/ warm-up the children - participate physically eg. Child write on blackboardRead together part by part <p>Play mention: No mention. Only instruction in the footnote ~<i>teacher should explain...</i></p> <p>Play guide: No guide in the textbook. Depends on teacher's incentive. Sometimes school provide guidelines.</p> <p>Play... loss of that time?</p> <p>Play is not wasting time. It also branch of</p>	<p>Learning should be occurred through play</p> <p>Play Construct:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Play should be something that give children knowledgeNot necessary located only in playgroundPlay particular thing in the classroom like counting shells is also playNot necessary must be allocated out of teaching and learning time <p>Play value/role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Enjoyment and funFree to play v. imprisoned

knowledge. During play, children can think and play at the same time. However, if they play too much, they will not concentrate on their learning. They cannot focus.	
Q5 PLAY CONTRIBUTION	Q6 HOW CHILDREN LTP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delight up the children from depress and emotional sentiments Release tension and problem Activate brain, develop mental and physical <u>Aspect of development helped TP:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication skills Emotional and feeling <u>Purpose:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoiding the sense of boredom and tension among children as well as teachers As a motivation to continue leaning while doing play in passing (<i>Play, learn then play again alternately</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn appropriate behaviour when socialise with other peoples – tolerate, responsible to others, take turn... <u>How do you know?</u> Can see the progress after learning period – change of behaviour <u>Valuable & very important v. wasting time:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If they play too much, they won't concentrate on their learning; they can't focus. But if we force children too much to learn they will get and receive nothing
Q7 LTP FREQUENT	Q8 CONFIDENCE
<i>Playground:</i> everyday during playtime or once a week in the morning <i>LTP:</i> Depends to subject and topic of the lesson but as <i>alternation</i> while learning such particular subject. <u>Example type of play:</u> Shop corner (very rare/ occasionally) Play in passing during teaching and learning time eg. <i>One minute physical exercise</i>	I'm confident. Can play in the classroom even special equipments are not there – eg. bring junk materials from home to make collage <u>Play/other activities distinguishes:</u> In terms of teacher's objective and style. Play: creative activity Other task: formal and strict situation like in ordinary school not like in pre-school <u>Response to parent's objectivity:</u> Children will feel bored if they keep on learning and the same feeling of us as an adult. During play, children are having fun and received the lesson thoroughly...
Q9 WILLINGNESS & PROBLEMS	Q11 FURTHER TRAINING
God willing. <u>Problems:</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Oppose the needs of parents - parents not satisfied, academic preference Have little knowledge about play activity Definitely lack of play materials 	Interested <u>Suggestions effective play:</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Organiser of pre-school suppose to provide more opportunity to teachers to attend more training courses that more details and specific on play Invite specialist to deliver talks to pre-school teacher Organiser should provide more appropriate play materials and resources; not to put burden on school to arrange it.

Q10 EXPERIENCES AND QUALIFICATION
About 7 years. MCE and 4 Thanawi. <u>Training Courses:</u> 2 times, teaching styles and classroom management. Visited a 'role-model' state religious department pre-school in another state. <u>Socio-economic background:</u> Mix between low and middle classes. Not many high-class children.

Appendix I

Example of Analysis of Teachers Responses: Differences and Similarities

1. Play: meaning and concept					
	SIGNIFICANCE/ DEFINITION	ROLE AND FUNCTION	PERCEPTION TOWARDS LTP	CONTRIBUTION	PLAY DISTINGUISHED
T01UU	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enjoyed and loved by children• The way children interact• Imagination of making something	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educational	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not too much• Unfavourable play <p>Make children forgetful and negligent</p> <p>Not all play activities – divide time between play and learning (reading and writing)</p> <p>Play for less able children; more drills and work for able children</p> <p>More suitable for new children</p> <p>Should be planned and guided by teacher</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop mind• Language• Socio-emotional• Physical• Cognitive thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not much difference• Delighting the children• Vs. conducted on individual child
T02UU	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication among children and get experiences through interaction• Non-stop interaction among children	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exchanging knowledge and experience• Pro-social behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Play in limited time• Not convenience to use play sometimes• Not that good, but...• Not too much play	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use mind to think• Reasoning/judgement about something• In 9 areas of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Happy, excited• Vs. teaching, guided important task
T03UP ↓ ↓ ↓ T30PK	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children's job, work and part of their life• Method of children's learning• Children's natural tendency and needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fun for teacher in teaching – no tension	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a hidden learning from play activities• The outcomes is not there and then• Can't see direct unless through knowledge• High level of learning/cognitive stage of thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical growth and development• Social & interaction• Language development• Cognitive aspect• All aspects of devt.• Add: critical thinking and special intelligent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vs. workbook-based pre-school• Fun, direct involvement vs. not fun, force & not what children want

2. Play Allocation

	PLAY STATUS	TIME FOR PLAY	PLAY FREQUENCY	MATERIALS/ FUNCTION	PLAY SPACE/CORNER	PURPOSES
↑ ↑ T05UI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching through fun activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every time teaching 	Everyday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lego. Lassy, puzzles, balls, kitchen set, beads, plasticine (but being used not during teaching and learning session – that’s for ‘after school’ activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have one corner for variety of play materials – arranged on shelves but no specific corner for each type of play Narrow space and no division for particular play activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand better Moral and social skills
T06UI	Play then work As alternate activity in finishing work	During teaching After school ‘club’	Everyday around 15 minutes – 5 min. tidy up	Use plasticine a lot – form objects and shapes	Have music corner and one special corner for play equipments	Develop thinking Discipline children Attract attention
T07RD	Play in passing (play, learn then play again alternately – as motivation to continue learning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During playtime Once a week in the morning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Everyday Depends to subject and topic Alternation while learning- 1to2 minutes Occasionally for domestic play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ILM – for art and craft subject or limited to 3R’s emphasises Junk materials for rarely domestic play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have outdoor play equipments Narrow space and no play corner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid boredom and tension for both sides Motivation to continue learning
T08RD	Learn through singing/songs Play while learning Alternation Work then play	Inserting play while teaching –no specific time for play	3 days a week (seldom) ½ hour a day	Card play, songs, plasticine – academic-based play (letters and numbers recognition) and one typical Malaysian traditional play type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subject corners display materials Display children’s work (art) No play corner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid the sense of boredom caused by repetitive academic form activities

3. Curriculum aspect

	KNOWLEDGE OF TEACHER	SOLUTION OF MATCHING TO NEEDS	CONTENTS/ APPROPRIATENESS	CURRICULUM AND PLAY	HOMEWORK AND WORKBOOK
↑ ↑ T08RD	Not quite sure what curriculum is No nothing about curriculum guidelines	Teach step by step, slowly, based on children's ability Not hurrying and finishing all syllabus	Overloaded syllabus and so many textbooks...can't cope	A little bit (guessing and not sound confident)	Teach based on textbook because the syllabus is the books and totally used the contents of textbook in teaching
T09RHL	Confuse about curriculum and regarded it as 'co-curriculum'	Still have to go through and finishing the syllabus, regardless of children's needs... Tried to make link between home and school but no response from parents Using flash cards Individual teaching; attention and drills Lot of repetition	Forget about the contents...just read it briefly but seems ok	(Confusing answer) – it suppose to be there No guide	Teaching based on textbook Workbook for drills
T10RHL		Discuss with head teacher and get her opinion Leave what the children could not carry on	Suit 6 years old level Textbook contents – fulfilling mental, physical and overall needs of children	Lesson alternate with play A bit guide. Highlighted some important points. Explanation during training course	Workbooks used for writing skills
T11RG ↓ ↓ ↓	When were asking about play in curriculum, the answer seems to appear that the teacher meant play as 'sport or PE while the guide referred to the textbook not the guideline	Give children more works and drills in school	Adhere to MoE curriculum Graduated children attained higher level of academic achievement compared to govt p.s children Definitely learning and not playing Continuity between p.s. and primary school	Yes (sport and PE) Sort of instruction of how to teach (in textbooks)	Drills and homework everyday Working on workbooks everyday

4. Teaching Style

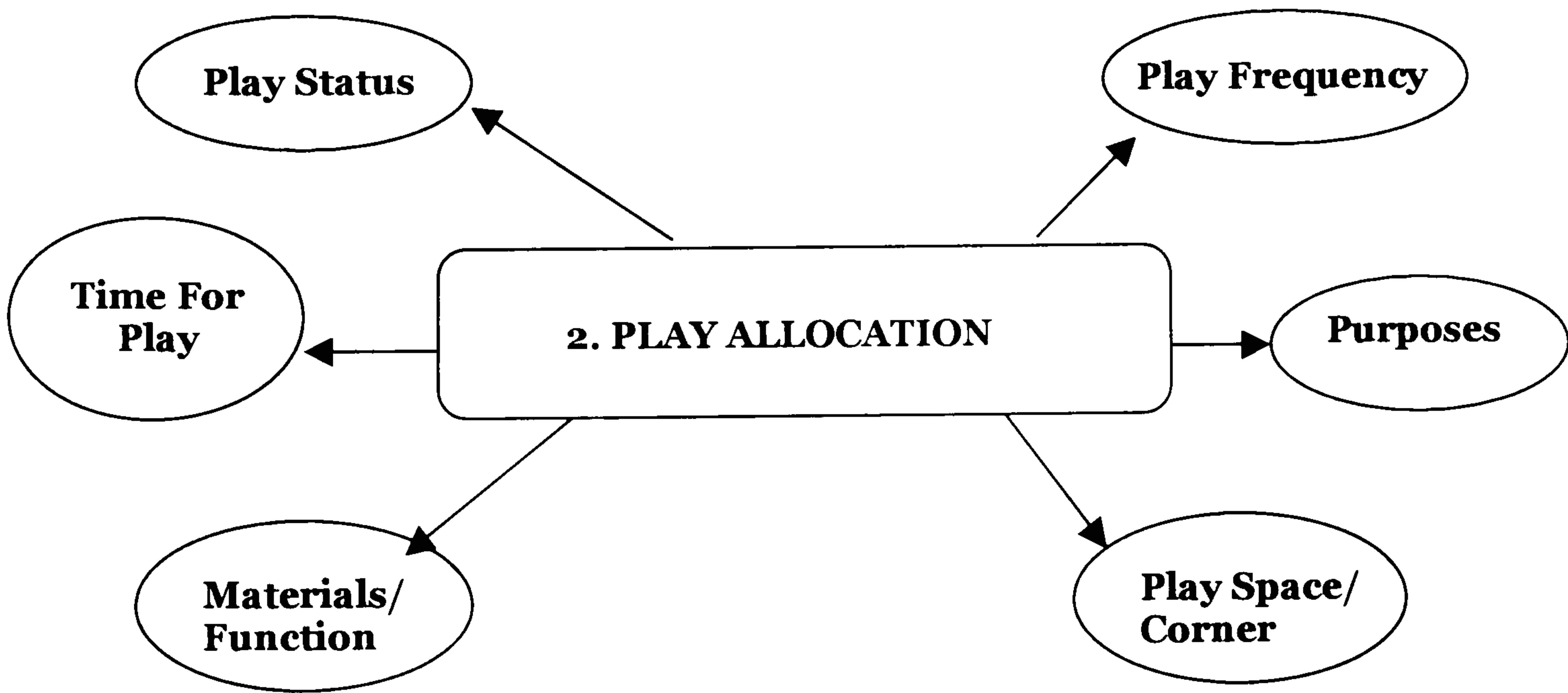
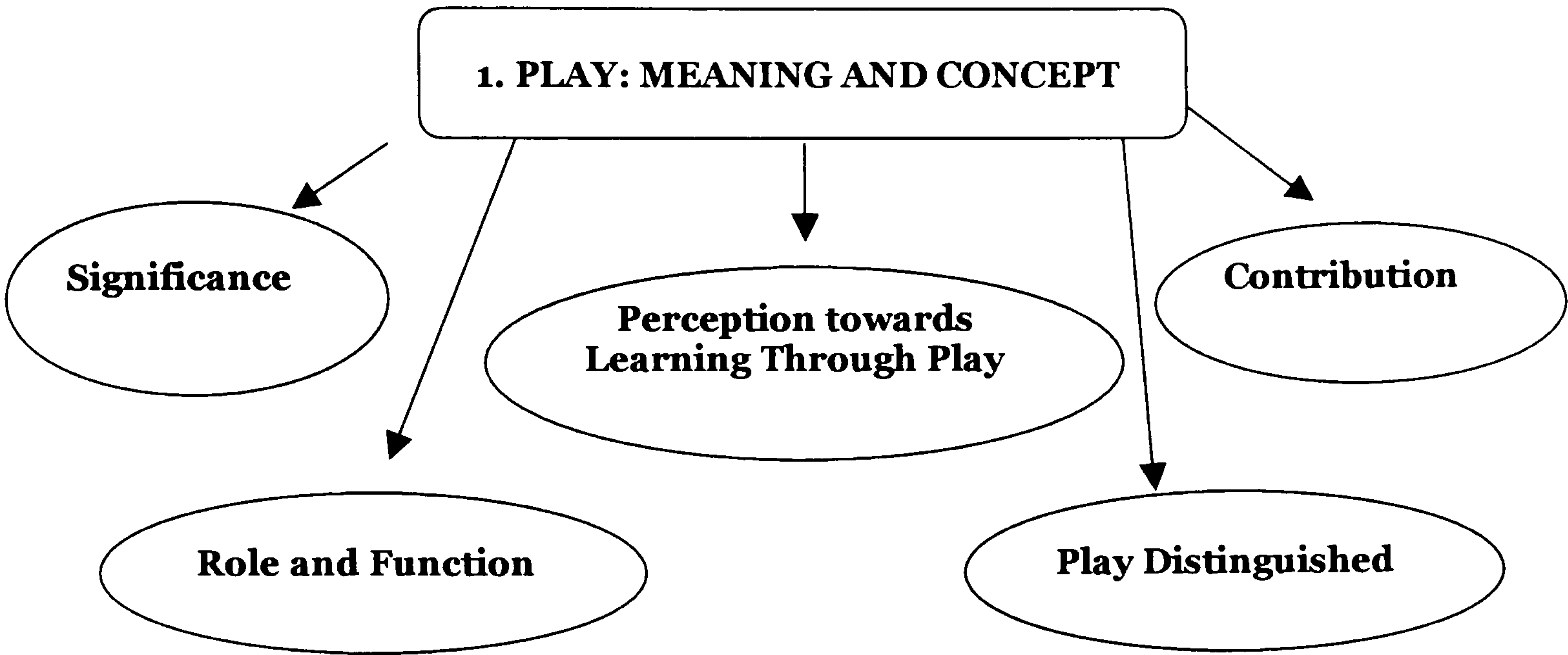
	GENERAL	MAIN FOCUSING SKILLS	APPROPRIATENESS AND REASON	PRINCIPLE/MOTTO	PLAY WILLINGNESS
↑ ↑ T12RG	Quite firm and strict Exposition Subject-based Grouping based on ability	Reading, writing and counting	Play while learning / play in passing – appropriate for children Same style as the first 3 months of primary schooling	Teach children until achieve educational potential and inculcation of moral values Understanding task of coming to school: can read, can count, can write Partnership with parents	Quite difficult to say that Interested
T13NGS	LTP Thematic approach Integrated learning Group activity –different parallel then rotated	Reading and writing	Appropriate – achieve the plan targets/ outcomes	Educating children to be well-disciplined and having good character; moral ethics home or school Inculcation of Islamic moral values	Interested and surely – the method of teaching
T14NGS	Collaborative and good-humoured Thematic approach Integrated learning – variety approaches Grouping based on children's personality and learning style		Not satisfied – no play materials Not enjoy to come to school – have to spend own money to buy some materials for fun activity Feel- burden – overloaded syllabus	No stress or forcing children – effect future Consider children's desire to play	Interested and delighted to do so Confident to implement play only in own classroom and own pre-school children
T15NGSP ↓ ↓	Thematic approach Exposition Ability based grouping	Reading and writing	Ok – children can received the lesson, sitting in group and easy to handle	Treat them as your own Well-disciplined and able to read by the time of statutory schooling Emphasising on learning only when children are ready and adapted to school environment	Fully implementation of play is not suitable Depends to subject Need 'extra' work and 'overtime' for planning and preparation

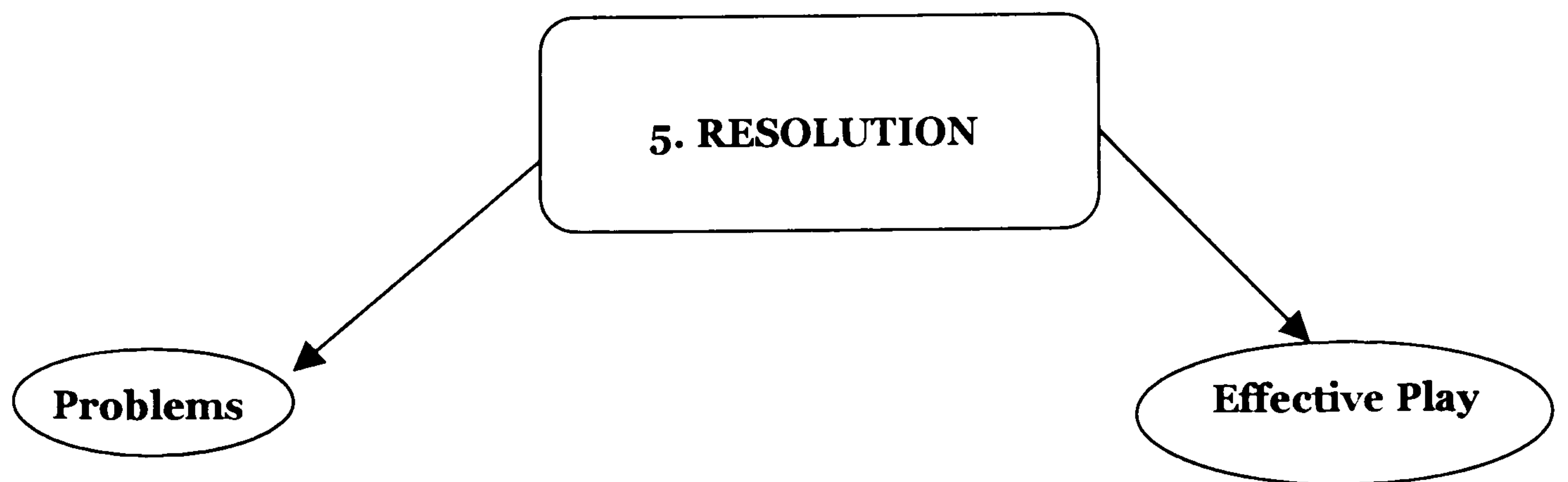
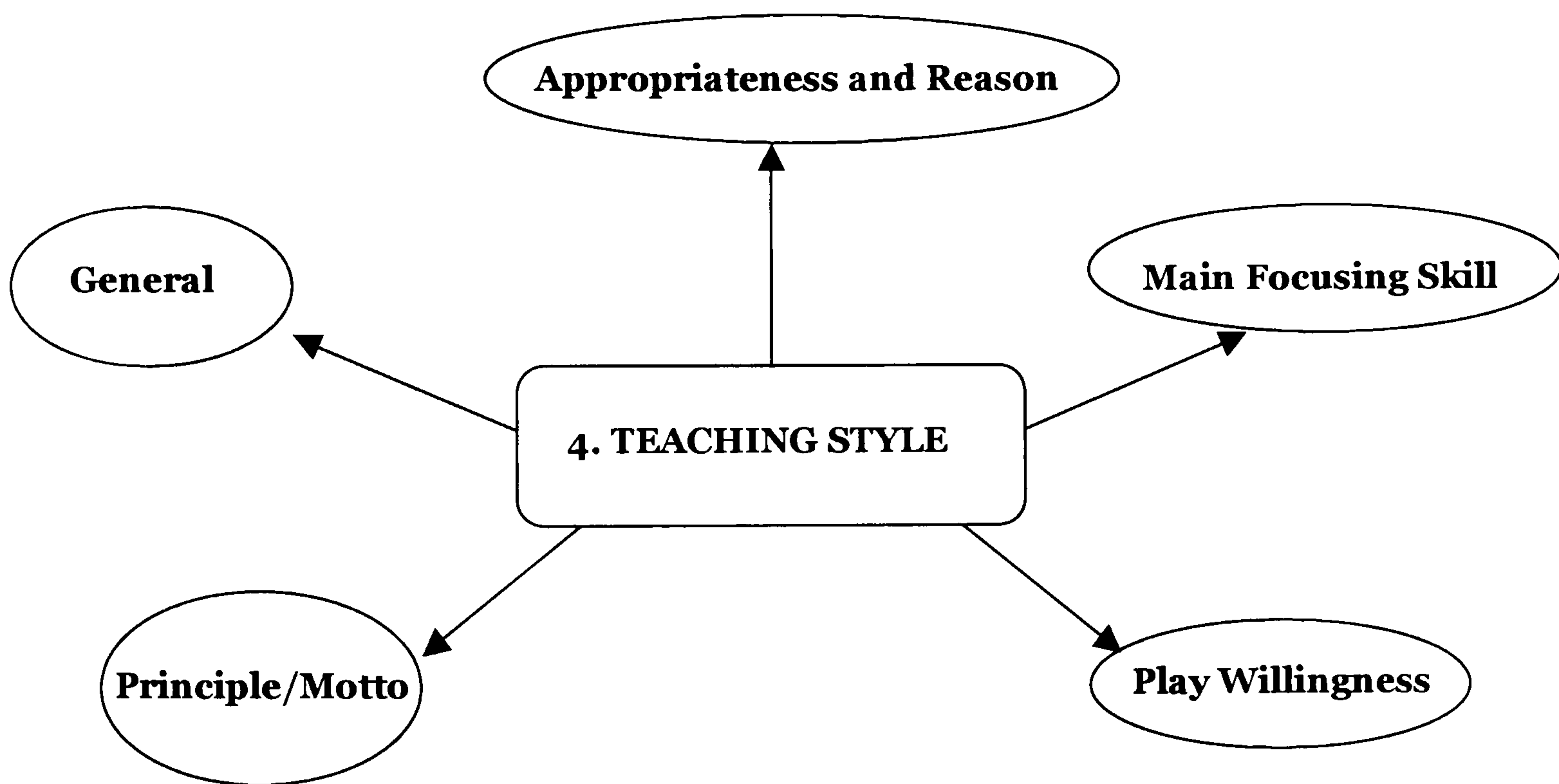
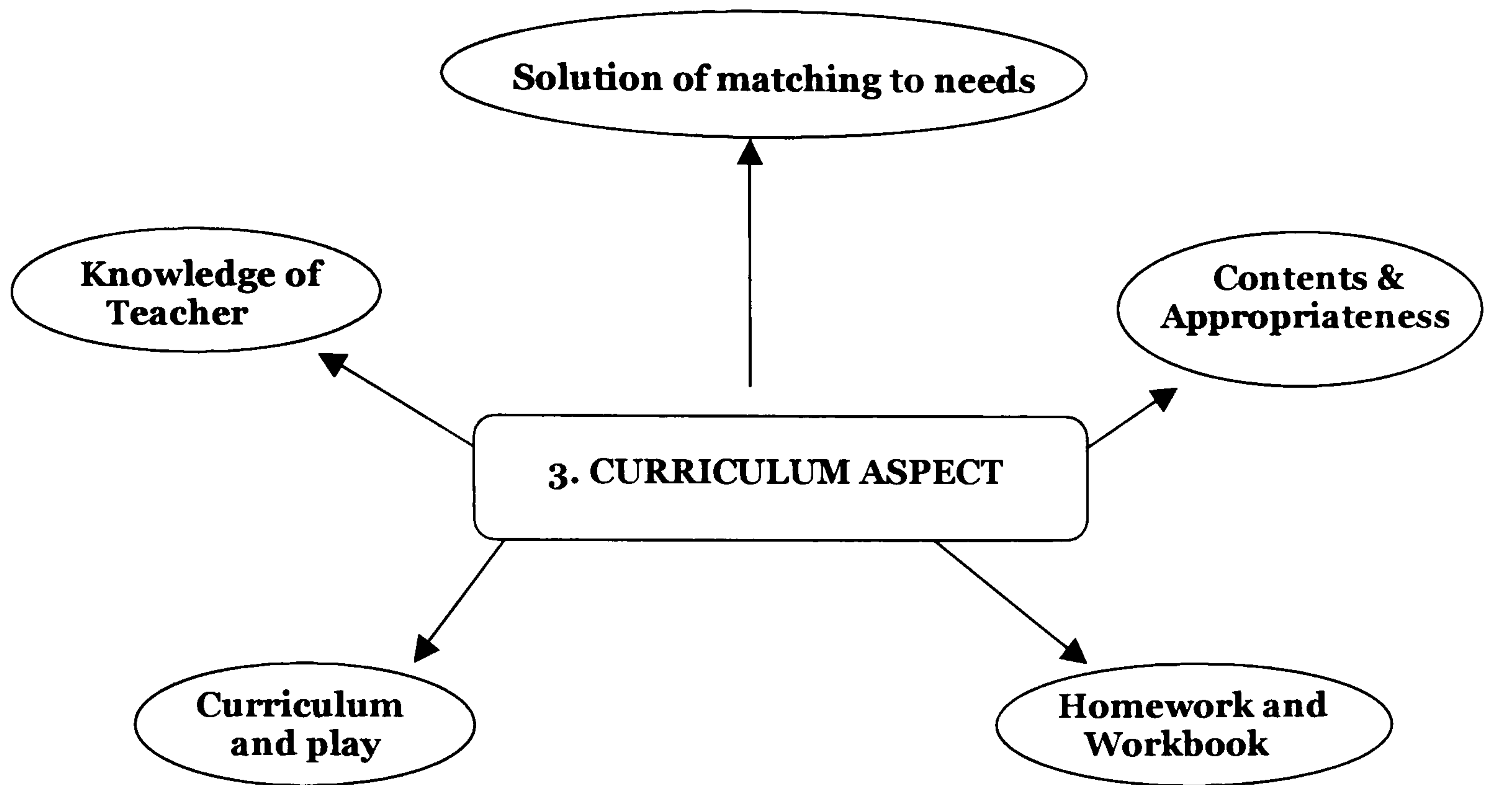
5. Resolution

	PROBLEMS	EFFECTIVE PLAY
↑ ↑ T16NGSP	1. Limited space 2. Pre-school prospectus 3. Overloaded syllabus 4. ‘Overwork’ feeling 5. Oppose the needs of parents 6. Budget – unavailable resources and materials 7. Teacher’s knowledge	1. Attractive and suitable play materials and resources 2. Appropriate spaces 3. More opportunity for training course
T17NGK	1. Not receive proper attention – no provision for play materials and resources 2. Time management factor 3. Oppose the needs of parents 4. Teacher’s knowledge	1. Get all facilities for variety play types and corners 2. Proper attention from administrator or top management
T18NGK	NOT REALLY INTERESTED: Don’t have enough time –priority to teaching and workbook drills Prefer to teach in a formal way	Time factor: I think play cannot be incorporated into pre-school daily teaching
T19GK	1. Lack of time –overloaded workbooks 2. Oppose the needs of parents	1. Co-operation from parents to understand teachers’ and children’s needs
T20GK	1. Takes time – tiring for teachers 2. Teacher’s knowledge 3. Teacher’s attitude 4. Oppose the needs of parents	1. Change attitude 2. Run workshop for parents 3. Time management/ division
T21GS ↓ ↓	1. Oppose the needs of parents 2. Overloaded workbooks 3. Insufficient amount of play resources 4. Limited and inappropriate space 5. Children’s disruptive behaviour 6. Children’s habit and attitude	1. Well-provided outdoor and indoor play materials 2. Appropriate area for pre-school building 3. Meeting and explaining session for parents

Appendix J

THEMATIC ORGANISATION IN DATA ANALYSIS
(Teachers' Responses)





Appendix K

Example of Analysis of
Parents' Responses

5.1.2 Purpose of Pre-school Education		
↑ P08RD	1.early education is very important compared to previous time 2. the most important is their socialisation, play with friends: priority	Social skills the most important
P09RHL	1. to be brave (not scared), know teachers and listen to them: self-preparation for Y1, self-discipline, able to socialise during the first stage of her school experience 2. Skilful in writing.	Social, emotional and writing skills
P10RHL	1. The child not to be left behind when entered primary school 2. Quick to learn, right to read and write, formal learning	Academic performance
P11RG	1. let him to be brainy, simple reading and recognising 2. socialise with friends	Basic education and social skills
P12RG	1. knowing friends 2. learning, knows how to read and all that (don't know how to teach at home)	Socialisation and academic skills
P13NGS	1. not afraid to socialise 2. can read earlier, can count and all that; complete the lessons before entering Y1	Socialisation and academic learning skills
P14NGS	1. alone at home, didn't know how to socialise and dealing with friends	Social skills
P15NGK	1. Don't have time to focus on educating all children : working parents, must know how to read properly 2. Socialisation, for the sake of their knowledge	Academic learning and social skills
P16NGK	1. not scared anymore when enter Y1- avoid such problem 2. not many people at home. Not teaching at home the same as teaching in school...listen to teachers not mum 3. preparation for preparatory schooling – not enjoy going to school	Socio-emotional skills Academic learning
P17NGSP	1. can read and count before entering primary school – these skills would not be taught in primary school... not to be left behind ... at least already recognised ABC, 123	Academic learning and basic skills
P18NGSP	1. to expose him to social life, mix with friends 2. she can learn as well as academic learning, understand what is AB	Social and academic learning skills
P19GS	1. expose to school world and mix with peers in the school	Social skills
P20GS	1. let children mix around, let them know something about school environment, could communicate with friends, talking to teachers..	Social skills
P21GS	1. recognise letters – test: classroom segregation Y1	Academic skills
P22GK	1. to let him mix with friends, seeing teachers, being a bit brave and confident...	Socio-emotional skills
P23GK	1. School could teach and give attention to him, beside friends, there is also teacher...quite difficult to train him at home 2. To let him success, be a worthwhile person, successful person...brainy, brilliant, well-behave 3. Got teachers and friends...alone at home...know and recognising	Personal problem Socio-emotional development Educational
P24GK	1. to have friends...mix with friends...mix around 2. would not cry in Y1	Socio-emotional skills
P25PD	1. to get themselves prepared for their proper school, so they will have no problem when they entered Y1 2. yeah, socialise and academic	Social and academic learning skills
P26PD	1. they can have more friends...not the same as at home :social learning more important than study	Social learning

5.1.5 Consciousness of Play Element in Pre-school Learning Activities		
	Indoors (Classroom)	Outdoors
P01UU	I don't know, never wait... arrange block sometimes	Playground and sports. Jump here and there
P02UU	May be they have...got play corners...play there if time to play	Sports day yearly...great celebration...honourable guest
P03UP	Don't know. Not sure. Can see materials but don't know how they involve...	In general, the school have all equipment
P04UP	That is their concept, overall...	Bring children visit /come outside – environmental play
P05UI	Just play the games with only Lego	Physical Education but don't know how its look like, then see-saw +swing
P06UI	Yes	Don't really provide much activity except playground because of the space
P07RD	Play only during break, for a while	No outdoor play
P08RD	Don't know, may be...	Don't know
P09RHL	Not sure what she played (disruptive behaviour)	No
P10RHL	That one is lacking. Lacking of play equipment/materials. Only use particular creativity book	Sports during sport season
P11RG	Word pictures ABC, sort of cube things...	Large climbing apparatus –pre-school yard. Then, sport
P12RG	Letters recognition	Have sports every Friday
P13NGS	Sing a song. learning through songs	Don't have playground yet but schoolyard. Don't know how they run practical exercise
P14NGS	Simple one like singing. More concentrate on learning	Sports in the field or running
P15NGK	Not a big deal	Less. Limited outdoor space. But, that one is not that important!
P16NGK	Some play materials in a box but not play space – ABC cards, plasticine	No outdoor facilities
P17NGSP	Not sure. Didn't watch them	I see there is play activity... brought sport suit to school
P18NGSP	Yes, it does. They have plasticine	PE outdoors, sports yearly, play outside
P19GS	Have some play materials, Lego available	That's the problem. Limited space
P20GS	Indoor but not outdoor. Have plasticine, Lego, I guess....	-
P21GS	S/times learn s/times play. Depends on the time. After having snack... take out material	Outside visit
P22GK	They have some, eg. For counting actv.	They have like football - rarely
P23GK	Siot down on the floor, sing	Outside visit/playground Play outdoors (learning)
P24GK	Spaces for small shops, selling and buying things	They have swing
P25PD	-	Yes, they do. Playground, field, wood, gym. Teachers guided them
P26PD	-	Yeah, gym. He loved it.
P27PH	Variety indoors and outdoors. All the toys are there and it's not keep under lock/key Have creativity session, making mask, play with painting, sand...lot of things	Efficient. Not organised but the facilities provided, slides,balls,swings. Play after nap time
P28PH	Adequate provision	Uh...uh...
P29PI	Lego-like math, learning how to count	Physical education Sports, end of the year

5.1.5 Perceptions and Knowledge on Children's Play					
	Significance/Concept	How Child Learn Through Play	How Play Develop IQ	Play at home/in school	
P01UU	Freedom, release tension - free to play when finished classroom lesson/after school Purpose: Fun & enjoyment: self-satisfaction, show off talent	Way of developing their mind Eg: Play 'Teacher & Pupil'	Strengthen memory Eg: Play Lego develop agility (brain) * Mind devt. limited	Attention/look after	Some stuffs are dangerous
P02UU	Could be channelled for education purposes- achieve objective For educational purpose. Play in lessons promoted children's interest Out of c/room not sure has value or not	Could educate children Learn social skills	May be couldn't be seen – depends to what type of play Out of school: I can't see how	Parents didn't see it as method of educating children – put less emphasise Narrow space, limited toys, limited type- based on book	The objective is academic & the channel is education Method towards educational aim
P03UP	Broad meaning: some fun time outdoors or indoors Children play all the time - will be thinking & imagine; creative, concentration something in their mind	Learn through continuous experience/repetition Eg: play chess	She could explain why, could accept and used it back in an appropriate way	Can be anything More freedom, more open, varieties	Pre-determined
P04UP	* Natural tendency for children, necessary, life to play, basic foundation Not only for the sake of play but for development	Different children, different style, different characteristics and stages Mind Developed through play eg: Lego	Depends to children level & individual differences Sometimes it comes naturally	Not well-managed/ unstructured	Guided by teachers
P05UI	* Leisure time- have enough time to have enough leisure time, enjoyment, exchanging ideas, informal talking	S/times yes/no- based on what they play Eg: dolls: know dress	Based on what they play	Small amount of children Not so many facilities	Many friends
P06UI	Enjoyment, stress released, exercise Learn something through play	Learn through enjoying Eg. Learn word through 'ball bouncing'	Depends on children	Just play without thinking- no specific games	Prepared facilities Many activities
P07RD	* Behaviours/actions, disruptive Mind development? Children keep on playing...	Learning through pretend play (cooking)	Not appropriate	After school	Time to learn

5.1.6 Perception towards Play and Learning (General)			
	General Comment (if any)	Play with children/Awareness	Academic Achievement
P12RG		Ever play with her. Cooking, using knife... Yes she did. Learned suitable cooking type for particular food	Depends to what type of play/ the materials. Soil, no. Academic play: yes.
P13NGS	Sort of rewarding. After learning, children might be brought to play slide eg. Play can be put as a reward of learning or learning first and then after that play.	Ever. Varieties. Eg. “The Fortune Wheels”. Sure they learned s/thing because we would ask them back	Of course. * Related to mind & heart. (Happy heart, happy learning)
P14NGS		Often. yes, learn s/thing from the play. Eg Riding fast on bicycle, fall down....	Could improve. Through play we can see her creativity
P15NGK		Usual. Ha! Even if we play, the way we play, we actually teach them	Can...because present housing area condition...children would be under pressure if they didn't play
P16NGK		Just play like scratching on papers, writing... Yeah, true. He saw me lightening matches he imitated!	Not really I think. If no schedule for play, their academic would be going down. Might develop academic stage...sometimes, I guess so.. don't know
P17NGSP	Play as a method for teaching academic learning	Less play with child. Yeah, they can learn spelling, know places/countries names. <u>We did know but we didn't implement it!</u>	Can, avoiding bored of long period of learning. That is the way
P18NGSP	Children didn't have any serious thing. All are play...teaching children using play approach, they could get faster	* Always. Definitely. My house is a play space...like a pre-school...they are always in learning environment. May be...we play with children, at the same time we teach them.	Play contribute to...its ok, but with condition...not to leave them play , enthusiastic with disadvantage thing...keep on prepared, would be excellent achievement
P19GS	During play they might learn something.	➤	Pre school children majority, would not accept if we teach them properly/formally: their brain not well-developed yet
P20GS	Children are not ready yet to learn seriously, they play a lot. Can't play, feeling of lacking something....	Yeah, sometimes, rarely Can't see that but can feel effective outcomes Something they have learned, talk, asks....	Keep on playing without any objective would be no achievement. Suppose to play with specific learning objective

5.1.7 Attitudes Towards Play in Pre-school			
	General	Appropriateness	Reduce/Increase
P01UU	(Teacher led play not children-initiated play)	Play like co-curriculum, play like LEGO, developing mind ...ok – led by teachers Free play – not suitable!	Even at home they can play ... In school: concentrate, focus attention Reduce play or maintained what already there – more on academic
P02UU	Play in lessons to promote children's interest. Not keep on only learning	May be...it's subjective matter No problem as long as achieving curriculum obj.	Not sure because don't know how far the play could be inculcated...(may be) useful
P03UP	Pre-school is a playtime all the time she is not here (at home),. P.S. play all the time. That's how they learn	Yeah, they should have that!	Should be balance – depends to school's /teachers' target
P04UP	More on academic due to present situation... I prefer academic rather than play	Appropriate for any p.s. because play is children's needs, right, natural tendency	Better put more on academic stress, reduce play
P05UI	Depend to school what is the accurate time to play...don't really know	Yes...time for them to have good relation with friends	Enough. They have to concentrate on their study first rather than play
P06UI	Depend to teachers either contribute to teach a lot from playing or just play	It's a must, part of curr. - cannot stress on just academic	Have some academic but not too academic – not being bored (balance)
P07RD	Play like counting, ABC, ok...play s/thing that benefit them If you want to play, we can play during break, that one is all right...play for a while, give them chance to play first then learning	No, cannot, that time is learning time...not appropriate	Better to reduce play
P08RD	Should not stress p.s. children to learn properly Better they play among them, know each other, play materials if there would be very good	Good if more play in the classroom. Better for him to play rather than proper learning and concentration	Better to increase play

Appendix L

Example of Teacher's Data Transcription

Q1 **MB:** Could you please tell me first of all about your current teaching style?

T26PD: Teaching style, ok .uh ... I normally, it based on the subject uh... Language, we have a lot of error interaction between the teacher and the pupils. So, then we have, we always start from the known to the unknown. We are going to do "Parents" or "Family"; right. That is our theme for this month. Family, we start with all that they know in their immediate family; father, mother, brother, baby sister; right. And then we bring in; grandfather, grandmother and better know grandfather, grandparent. Better know grandparents. Then, we bring in; auntie, uncle...all those, right. After that we have a song based on the family like we have the single song: "*Where is mother, where is mother, here I am, here I am...*" 'Bahasa' also we are doing the same approach.ok. So, you are talking about maths, numbers, Numbers, beside of course we are talking about my parents and my family. How many in your family? Right. Parents 2, grandfather, grandmother 2, brothers, sisters, you know, may be they have 7 in a family. So, is your family big or small? Big. More introduction... kind of...talking.

MB: some sort of like connecting...

T26PD: Yes, yes, that is the real I think you should be done because children, we cannot let them stick on quiet. If they stick on quiet and then, we do not know their progress. We need to allow them. Let say we ask question we want them to answer.

MB: How about grouping of children in the classroom?

T26PD: Ok. Grouping of children, we set three sets of children in this class. So, we have got that good one, the average and the weak one. The weak one ah...not able to recognise that...so that we have done is we put our very good one to one group, so they can work independently by themselves, so, what we do is you just give them the worksheet or whatever we want them to do, they can do by themselves because they can read and they can copy. Then, another group, we decide as an average one, a little bit of guidance, certain work they do not know. So, those are the works we have to guide them. Yeah. And then we have got three weak one, 3 of all; that one personal. We have to go to them and then tell to them you know, what we have done here, ok. Face on "muka". They cannot, they do not know what is face on "muka". You know, they cannot read the word. But they know but a pass oral they know, this is face, this is "muka". But they do not know how to read a word. So, we have to tell them, we will spell for them, m-u- (mu), k-a- (ka) = muka. F-a-c-e = face, but, it's tough for them and so that they are not passed. Because they cannot spell, they have a trouble of looking a letter, then write. Along the card, write. It takes along time. So, we two of us, are hope by, helping them to do, this way, this style.

MB: How about learning style of children?

T26PD: Umm...they are actually each child they got their own personality and style. You know, some of them have mum and dad. Attentions are very good. So, they learn very well. But some of them they are, they have lack of attention and these are the pupils you have to give back your attention, you know. After 5 minutes they are looking around. So, we have to get their attention back. Some of them they tend to do a lot of writing. So, some of them they seem feel tired. So, I don't know what is this until they give a lot of attention. Can go toilet. Yeah, depend on each individual child.

Q2 MB: How do you organise your classroom... in terms of structure of the learning programme?

T26PD: Ok, learning programme, we are doing with MI (*Multiple Intelligent*) approach. Right! So, we have that senses, sometimes we have corners you know. So now we have corner centres "la". By right, emm...we should have umm...you know it's a classroom, you know if the classroom is very big, so we can have sort of...umm... Sometimes the child knows that this is a science centre, this is a math centre. And a group of children can go and look, like that. So, we have to set up this corner. We got the Math corner, the science corner, then we have a nature table, interest table. English you got and "Bahasa" you got.

MB: How about the play corner here?

T26PD: Yeah, play corner; we actually do not have much play corner. We do not have play corner because the children, if you pass the play corner, I think, they intend to play more. Like we have like drama-play. You know, we do play like a teamwork like that. So, in the morning, let say you got some playing; snake and ladder and then number games and all that. So there, they come in, they collect and play. That kind of play. We don't have a special corner.

MB: How about arrangement of table-chairs here?

T26PD: We...we...yeah, during activities we need a lot of spaces then we will shift the table. Otherwise, we just use this area. On the other side, for our circle time. We do have circle time. During circle time, we talk to them and sometimes we talk about health, loneliness; right!. We ask the children what to do in the playground, you must not suppose to push your friend, you must not being rough, you cannot do like that, and then we get them together. And then, festive season, we have circle time because Chinese New Year is coming. So we will sit around and then we will talk to them uh...other children you know, I will bring things inside; oranges; why do we have oranges, red dates, we have got 'sarsi'... and then "kueh bakul". And then we will tell them why we have them. And then the red bucket is very important, the red bucket for Chinese, you see. So, whatever the foods we eat, then we cook and all that. We talk to them.

MB: Is it always before the class begin?

T26PD: Umm...we will find a time “la”. Let say during art lesson, art is not that important. Then, we will see sometimes then we talk to them. We do not have a special circle time on the timetable. So we will try to, just sit a few minutes from the period and then we talk about. The timetable is provided by the head mistress. Sometimes we...that’s depends on the children capability, you know. Some of them, they do not finish their work ah, so when they coming we ask them to finish. For those who have finish, I said they can (sic) play game while they are waiting. I, on the other hand, we give reading. Miss XXX (*trainee*) here helps up with their book sheets. They like that.

MB: How do you feel about the appropriateness of your current teaching style and organisation for children learning?

T26PD: How do I feel? Umm...actually, I feel that you know, there can be improvement ‘lah’. You know because nobody is perfect, right. So as we teach, we gain more experience. Then, we try to incorporate whatever experience you have and try to make teacher style better, more interesting. So its like everyday we are learning certain thing, how did we deal with a child he didn’t want to write, how we did encourage anything like that. So its everyday process... you are learning.

Q3 MB: I think this ‘Tadika” has its own curriculum.

T26PD: Yes.

MB: How do you feel about the curriculum content and process of this pre-school?

T26PD: But, actually what I know the curriculum that we have actually following the Education Department you know, Ministry of Education, I think they are thinking of incorporating MI approach in all the schools. Yeah, so we are actually the first school using this method. Yeah, uh... for the past 3 years, we used this method and I hope we can do that this year. Certain schools are already come in with MI approach, you know, holistic ‘lah’. So, I think that this method actually, quite good. Its quite good because we give the children a lot of knowledge, you know, we give them the ability to speak and all that. In fact, I got one child who was with me last year. She is not in ‘3 Bestari’ and she’ll be taking part in a “Feminine Oscar Peace”, you know on NTV’s7, yeah, next week she is going on. She, when she first came to school, she was always crying, wanted to go home and all that. So, because of encouragement and all that, she stick on until another year, now she goes on the ‘NTV’ (*TV Channel*) you see. So we call that umm... that give us intensive (sic) to work harder with children.

MB: Do you think that the curriculum is fulfils the needs of child development?

T26PD: Yeah, because we teach a lot of ah... we have moral, right, where we teach interaction like interpersonal, intrapersonal, then they learn how to look itself, they

learn how to share, something like that. Then, we give them general knowledge yeah and above of that, we teach with the 3R, wRiting, Reading, aRithmetic.

MB: How do you set about resolving the inevitable conflicts of matching curriculum to children needs? *(I have repeated this question 2 times, and then only the interviewee understood what I mean)*

T26PD: Children needs ah... we... I think we group them together, we group them through need, special attention, then, we group them together to give more attention to that group. So, all those who are more independent, they can do on their own. So, we encourage them but at the same time we give them all the independence. Let them to be independence 'la'!

MB: In the curriculum guidelines, is there any mention of play?

T26PD: Play... we... actually we have that through method, right? One is the Montessori method. They do more with playing, more with playing. For us, umm... not so much I think on play. Not so much I think on play. But of course if it's our timetable can exceed 3 hours, then, we will bring in more play, yeah. But because our timetable is so short, we must cover so many subjects. So, less time it spent for play.

MB: Is there any guide on how to use play in teaching?

T26PD: The guideline ah... I don't remember, because the guideline that they have given us, they have a... play therapy. They do mention about play therapy. They do mention. Yes... yes... but they don't stress on it so much. Umm... very short paragraph.

MB: Do you use or have textbook?

T26PD: Yes, we do have textbook. We do have. Yes. We order. All the child (sic) has to get a set even activity books. In fact, here we do book sheet, activity book ah... creative writing, exercise book.

MB: Do you think that the advent of your pre-school curriculum will lead to the loss of that time if it will be used for play?

T26PD: I think, yes, personally I think yes if so much plays. I know, no doubt that they will learn but then, they will take up so much on playing. So, what about your reading, your writing, language and all that? Language of course when you are doing playing we learn vocabulary, something like that. But, actual writing, reading uh number?...yes.

Q4 MB: Do you have a particular philosophy regarding the education of pre-school children?

T26PD: Umm... actually I'm not very sure what you mean by philosophy...

MB: What is your principle or motto regarding pre-school education?

T26PD: Regarding pre-school education; meaning how I feel teaching the children? Ok. So, well, I think it is worthwhile job. You know why, because as a teacher we are educating them, right. And pre-school teachers are very important, Without us pre-school teachers, the primary school teachers can have problem you know. Another thing is they come in they do not know anything at all. They crying, you know, they cannot read, cannot write. At the end of the year, you see the work of the children produced for you. Yeah, it is, especially you know, you can worth all the effort that you put in, you know and they are able to read and write. Then their parent come back to you, you know, they ring up: "*you know, you doing so well*"... and all that, your feeling...

MB: Now, I would like to ask you, what is your construct of play? What do you mean by play for children?

T26PD: Play ah... learning and playing at the same time. Play actually must come with learning, you know. That is no point just pushing everything to them and they just play, play, play without result. Playing must be guided actually, its you have to involve a lot of more language, right. You know, whatever I think that, whatever they want to play, I think they must have a topic 'la'. You must learn from there that what I think if the child just play, now you know you give them 'masak-masak' and ask them to play like that, uh, yeah, they will play cooking but then you see the thing is you have to tell them than just play. Ok. Like you are in the kitchen, ok, this is what you do. You use knife to cut, add more vocabulary. Saying the dangers of the knife. The dangers of the fire. Everything can come into the play.

MB: Is that mean you can say that play is educational?

T26PD: Yes, it's educational. It is educational. Unfortunately we don't know how to forward for.

Q5 MB: Can you explain how play contributes to child development?

T26PS: Ok. Sharing, they learn to share during play. Its very important they learn to share especially, uh, children who are only one child in the house, but they got so many things. They don't know how to share, you know. Ok, another thing is they learn to take turn, its not like I want first, I want first you know, take off them uh vocabulary, some in...

MB: What aspect of child development that you think can be improved through play?

T26PD: Through play ah... umm...I think of many things ah... ha...ha...ha...(laughter) because...

MB: Do you think that play can develop emotional, physical, cognitive skills?

T26PD: I think emotional things like I said just now like they know to share; they learn to take care, yeah, cognitive, fine motor skills, and all that will come in. So, they have to think like later may be we play game and then, creative thinking will come in you know.

MB: So, what purpose do you use play in the classroom?

T26PD: Play with children for what purpose? Ah, to teach certain thing 'lah', like today we have like this, family and then we are using a play therapy like that, we ask them to do, acting and then we actually bring in all the things for them to play. Say, you are using a broom. They use a broom to sweep, uh, then brother was playing the ball and all that, you know, to show them. So all these things are something to do with playing.

Q6 MB: How do you think children learn through play? I mean, how can you tell that children are learning when they are playing?

T26PD: Um... like we do revision after revision. Ok, what have you learned? You know ha, ok, just now we have play, just now. What you think we do? What are the apparatus involved? Then, they will tell you. Sort all your questions for your technique; you see that they have actually absorbed what you instruct them. But, if they cannot answer your question, they keep damn, they keep very quiet, they are not learning anything.

MB: Some people say play is valuable and very important and some say children are wasting their time in pre-school by playing when they should be learning/ working. So, what do you think?

T26PD: I think we have to incorporate 'lah'. Both. Ah... not every time, study, study, study...drills, drills, drills... We just have to give them time to play. But, play with guidance, so they will learn something. Part of the lessons.

Q7 MB: How often do you make provision for learning through play in your classroom?

T26PS: For play? At least, once a time per week. Like today we have play and yesterday we have music and all that. Sometimes, we do moral time we do play, acting. ã, we do play acting and all that.

MB: How about play like LEGO and all that?

T26PD: Upper level... not... not in the classroom, not as a lesson. Not as a lesson. We play that, play dough and all that uh, umm... in the morning 'lah'. In the classroom, actually, we do have our set... limited you know. So many children... so

we did arrange for them. No, we do not have another place. We don't have another place that is set up just for playing. We don't have that. We always play in the classroom before they start (learning).

Q8 **MB:** How confident are you about using play?

T26PD: Yes, I think they will learn a lot of playing (sic) but time constraint.

MB: What, in your view, distinguishes play from other activities/task?

T26PD: Children; I think ah, when you said play, games, they are very interested, they are very interested, you know! When you say, writing, you can see the face uh... ha... ha...ha...(laughter). Its like... its like... so, I think you know if you have a play lesson, play therapy, a play lesson, I think the children will like it better. They are more alert. That way 'lah'...

MB: Do you feel you are able to implement play in your classroom?

T26PD: We should be able to...yeah.

MB: In case if a parent ask you why her 5/6 years old has 'played' all day, what is your response honestly? Can you justify the child's play to the parents' objectivity?

T26PD: Yeah... the thing is, it should be not be every period 'lah'... you should not done every period 'lah'. You see, if you do it, once, 3 times a week, ok, no problem. Shouldn't be a problem because parents, I'm sure those educated parents also they know that children not necessary ...you know...must always concern study only, they do not play and if play like... we are explain to the parent, we are teaching them, with lesson you know. We are playing with the lessons, you know, just play, not just let them to play, so they will be learning a lot of things from there. Once you explain to the parents they can take it but not every period. Not every period. You have specific period in a day you play. No. That one, I think the parents not allow that. Yeah.

Q9 **MB:** I just want to confirm the answer. Are you interested in and willing to implement play in your classroom?

T26PD: Yeah.

MB: What are the problems do you think will face you in implementing it?

T26PD: Umm...may be, eh... you are talking about play every period or just once or twice a week? If every period, I can see cause a bit problem 'lah' because a lot of movement, a lot of talking... I see a bit of discipline problems. I don't see any problem in learning through play, you know, the children in fact, also learn better

because at the age, children would like to play. I think, unconsciously they are learning 'lah'. Through play, I don't see any problems in implementing play but only the discipline side, a bit more noise.

MB: How about what they called, some sort of 'overloaded' syllabus? So, do you think that if you implement play in the classroom, you don't have enough time to finish all of them?

T26PD: Umm...yes, because I think studying through play, it takes more time. It takes more time. Ok. Let's say you have planned, topic on "Plant", ok. So you want to learn about tall tree, short tree and all that, ok. You bring the children out, ok. You'll be the tall tree, and then, you've got another one, the shorter one will be the short tree, and all that. So, in fact, some times 'lah' to explain, every time you want to play, you want to come out and act and play, so, it took more time.

Q10 MB: Ok. Let's talk about your experiences. Ok. How long is your experience as pre-school educator?

T26PD: Ah... I have been looking for, as a pre-school teacher for the last ten years. Ten years from 80th something to 90th and then I stop and then after that I continue again. So, more less (sic) 10 years 'lah'. At that time ah.. what they call attachment teacher. Yeah. Because the teachers, they sent for courses, 3 or 4 months. So, I was attachment teacher for 3 years before I join the Montessori. Attachment, primary school, yeah, after that I came out, I did the Montessori, the Diploma, London Montessori, up and after that I open up my own 'tadika' in Penang, yeah, open up and then for... until 1990, then, I found that I need hands because my children are growing up, then it time to take care the children. You see, during that time I feel that I give so much attention to other people's children and my own children will be neglected. So, I stop and I take care my children. I stop for... until my children... quite big. I think form 3 like that, and then I'm back to teaching. They all are quite able to act independent right now. You know, I don't have to see their homework and all like that. Then, I'm back to teaching. I actually get a correspondence course first, from London Montessori and they come to give us our workshop in USM (*University Science of Malaysia*) and then after that, we set for the exam, and then went to London for a couple of week to see how they set up, and got my certificate and my diploma from them 'lah'.

MB: Do you have any certificate from Teachers College in Malaysia?

T26PD: No, I don't have. Only my experience. Montessori is ok....(laugh).

MB: How about training?

T26PD: Whatever the consultant, our consultant is Dr. XXX. She will let us know, ok...this university is conducting this course, and all that and told me to attend 'la'. So, they give us just attendance certificate. How we treat the child, you know, you must be able to study each child; so important.

MB: How about socio-economic background of parents?

T26PS: Oh yeah, they are very highly qualified you know. We got doctor, lawyer, 'Dato', 'Datin'. In fact, Tadika Diyana's children are the upper level. You see here the Malay children are speaking English more than 'Bahasa'.

Q11 MB: Would you like further training for the purpose of implementing play?

T26PD: Yeah...because ...actually, I'm more interested in language 'lah'. I was thinking because my son is in Australia. He says, may be I'll go to Australia and pick up English Language. Certain thing, you know, not just half-half like that, teaching English and then of course PTA (*Malaysian Pre-school Association*) and all these, you know. I don't have the time yet.

MB: Can you suggest ways of how play can be effectively incorporated into pre-school teachers daily teaching?

T26PD: In daily teaching uh ... the thing is you have longer timetable. This, one and other thing is...emm... I think it's time 'la'. Mostly time. If time, if we allowed more time, you can do a lot of play. Yeah... it's more time 'la'. In fact, (*this pre-school*) give us time, give us 5 hours ã, particularly every lesson uh, we can have a little short while of play. At the same time you can still have time for them to do reading, writing and things...

Appendix M

Example	of	Parents'	Data
Transcription			

Q1 **MB:** What is your understanding of early childhood education?

P28PH: To me, early childhood education is ...depending on how old the child is 'la'. You start the child at very early stage meaning to say at three, so, what em... the thing which is important is to let them the exposure of umm... like discipline, getting to know friends, friendship and basically just a little bit of introduction of alphabet and calculation and all that 'lah'.

MB: What are the main purposes of sending your child to pre-school?

P28PH: Em... other than what I have mentioned just now, another thing is to make sure that they can read and that before they go to the primary school.

Q2 **MB:** Why did you send your child to this particular pre-school?

P28PH: Ok, when my eldest was about three, I was already searching for umm... any child centre or pre-school centre but I tend to choose... There are quite number which is quite...nevertheless they are sometimes like Chinese background and I, as a Muslim I do considered what my children take like their meals and all that. I prefer to be prepared by Muslim. To me, this childhood centre, recovered both the ...umm... They have the Islamic Values as well and also the education is quite complete. I'm very happy with what their system is and how they manage it. So far my children are sent here, the first three girls and my three daughters that I sent them here, I can see that they have a lot of improvement. By five years old, my first and second daughter, they can read indeed but my third one is a little bit slow but may be it's my fault as well because I don't really approach her that much because I'm more concentrating on the first and the second because they are already in the primary school.

MB: So, what is your expectation from this pre-school?

P28PH: Umm... my expectation is beside...em...my children able to read and write; at least they have some basic understanding of what school is before they really sat into the primary school. At least they know they are suppose to come early, have a discipline, have to bear whatever they are suppose to do, whatever they are not suppose to do, because when they are at home they tend to do a lot of things... sometimes we just ignore what they do, so we are not quite strict. When they come to school, they know the regulation.

MB: I just want to know why did you sent all your children here; I mean you didn't choose any other than this particular....

P28PH: Ok, one, other than the system itself, I'm very comfortable with the owner, I mean the owner. I'm not just said as 'Ibu' 'lah' because everybody addressed her as 'Ibu'. She is very close with all... nearly all the children here. She is quite strict, she is very strict and I like it very much she is very strict in class, but beside that she knows how to tackle with children. She knows how to tackle... and then she manages to control the children very well and at the same time she is also quite strict with the teachers.

Q3 MB: Have you ever read the content of this particular pre-school curriculum?

P28PH: Yes, yes when I first came umm... for my first daughter, I do look through, discuss with her, what are the curriculum that was available, that particular time umm...I was already...umm for me is already adequate for that for their level and as time goes by umm... 'ibu' improves a lot in... she add up a lot of new things like computer learning, so I think she is keeping it up-to-date 'la'. She do teach mental arithmetic.

MB: What do you think about it? I mean...is there something interesting about it?

P28PH: Interesting about?

MB: The curriculum

P28PH: Yeah, to me umm... to be very serious with all the children you can't manage because they are very young, I can see, to make umm...at least what she'll be doing and the curriculum she set in, I think is the interesting...

MB: Do you think that this pre-school provide your child with a good range of play-based activity, outdoors and indoors?

P28PH: As...as...what I can see umm...for err...half of the day that they are be here, so with all the exposure that they have umm...with the mixing with all the other children, I think whatever they provide the children here, I think is the adequate even though they can improve more but, its depends on how umm... the situation is, may be economically and also lot of things to consider

MB: So, that's for outdoor play-based activity?

P28PH: Uh...Uh...

MB: How about indoors, is there any play-based activity?

P28PH: Ok, umm...indoors activities for them, there are quite a lot, because I can see, when I, even every year when I come and take their report, we do a sit, I mean one-to-one with the teachers whoever involved in managing the children and then teaching them, usually the class teacher umm... from what I can se they do have all

the important indoor activities like developing the children umm... it's quite creative all the games, and all that quite creative in the sense that it is not just a game but it also an educational game, I think it's fair, I mean I'm quite satisfied with what they have here.

MB: Right, can you tell me about the method of how the school educate your children?

P28PH: The method...umm...meaning to say how they handle the children?

MB: Yes...the way, the style...

P28PH: May be its context to others, may be, I...I, to me the way they handle, the way they teach the children; they segregate the children based on age, so umm...and for each ...every...umm...each group have their own teacher and their way of teaching is different at the lower ages, at two to three years olds; sometimes they need more games and all that and they just...they input of education...I mean like learning quite is not that serious compared to ...I mean 5 years old and 6 years old. Their 6 years old umm... 'ibu' herself do most of the things to see that every children whoever and comes out from this centre should be able to read either English and (sic) 'Bahasa' and also manage to count, and umm... the books that she choose, the... publisher and all that, I can see is not the same every year, she change and the... and the umm...content is quite good.

MB: So, have you ever asked your children of what they have learned in school or what they do in school?

P28PH: Yeah! Yes, we have to, may be I read it but actually to sit with them I think, about umm...two to three times a week we really have to sit with the children. By right we should do that everyday. When I'm not working, definitely I'm with the family, I'm working, every working from 9.00am until 10.00pm, so , it is quite difficult for me to do, so, when I came back, by the time I came back, my children are all in bed already...so not much can be done 'la'... (laugh) basically when I'm on leave, because at my working I was like umm...what I have , my alternate week , so I can concentrate about one week .

Q4 MB: So, let's start thinking that we always relate children to play. So, what do you understand by the word 'play' in children's world?

P28PH: From what I understand, as a parent, play can be distinguishing either play alone without any umm...educational basis other than interaction with their friends and another one is play with educational in it like umm...like what they tend to do in this centre. They tend to...umm...makes education umm...what do I said umm... they tend to teach the children, they are playing like ...especially 3 and 4 years old because they can't be that serious with it. To me umm...play can be divided into two, either one... may be more but to me is that...

MB: Well. So...but...I mean in your own view, what is your definition of play?

P28PH: (Silent)

MB: Is there any value, any purpose or...

P28PH: Play to me, you see in err...if the parent say they play, meaning to say something that they should be able to enjoy, yeah, besides, may be they didn't sense any learning there but...but...err... to me if the children say they are playing there should be an enjoyment with what they are doing and then ...ha, yeah...

MB: So, have you ever played with your child?

P28PH: Play...I...usually what we play at home other than err...I joined them when they play like err... hide and seek and all that, because I have four daughters basically, so I have no sense...so what they play is basically hide and seek, all the err choices like dolls, something like that, soft dolls, teddy bears, so, another thing I bought like 'Scrabbles' and all that and also 'Monopoly', so that are most of the things that as they stay with them, few more ...that they can remember.

MB: Are you aware that your child learned something when they play with you or play at home?

P28PH: Yes, other than the game itself, I prefer choosing games that umm...can educate them or umm... allow them to think. As I said I preferred if they play like 'Monopoly' they tend...they should be able to count because it is ... I tend to choose the game err...according to age because they said there, beside of game they have umm, for younger ages, for all the ages, some of these they segregate between 8 years olds to younger ones, so, I choose that type of games so that if ...beside we are much closer to them...with my children, we can also educate them at the same time. Hmm...

MB: All right... so, how about, let say, playing with dolls, do you think that they also learn something when they play things like that...

P28PH: Yeah, yeah...other than that, they umm...every...to me if they play I mean they might be learning even though it is not like umm... a very serious education. Surely they be learning something like interactions, sharing...that's all to me, something that they can learn...because they will have different umm...perception of schooling in...I mean if they play alone, you can see the differences in the children whoever...if they are like a single child, nobody paying them, so the way they play and the way they react to situation would be different.

Q5 MB: Well, how do you think that your children are learning through play or what do you think of children learning through play?

P28PH: I think umm... if they learned through play, it's much better they can umm...they can understand better and also if you do something that you like and definitely you remember better compared to a serious education, to me despite the

serious one they should be able to have fun and at the same time they can learn something about it.

MB: Do you think that your children can develop their intelligent skills through play?

P28PH: umm...because as we say, play can be defined as umm...an educational play as well, so certain certain umm games they can sharpen their mind, their...like their calculation, memory and all that. So, I think such a game that they play if even ...do help them a lot in building their mind, their...a lot of things as they grow, play do help.

MB: How about academic achievement? Do you think that your child can improve their academic achievement through play?

P28PH: Again, it depends on what type of game as I said I divided play into two. If they play just like umm...simple...I mean not like using their mind that much like calculation, umm...concentration, more on physical sports, so basically umm...may be it do help in their health but not err...directly like umm...improving on their umm...concentration and all that. But to me, as long as the game is a healthy game, it do help them in any way.

Q6 MB: How about play in pre-school classroom? I mean let's focus on 5 and 6 years old children. Is it appropriate?

P28PH: I think...for me 5 and 6 years old definitely they still have to play umm...they can't run away with it and at the same time umm... But it should be lesser compared to our younger age because umm...because at this time, for me they should be able to really prepared themselves in order to go to the primary school. As I say minimum, they should be able to read and to count, to do simple mathematics. So, they should be serious on certain, certain things. Hours of playing should be lesser compared to younger age.

MB: So, do you think that we should reduce or increase play-based activities in the pre-school classroom?

P28PH: To me the person involved like the teachers, they should know the hours of...because all children have to have time to play. They make games and all that but besides that but too much of playing, just leaving them alone to be on their own play, without any proper purpose that doesn't serve ...umm... is not a good curriculum to me. But then if they umm... put down, I mean they leave down properly the hours the children should be spending on games and also should be spending on serious studies depending on their age, depending on their level, I mean ...they should divide the time properly.

MB: All right, ok. So what do you think the differences between play at home and play in school?

P28PH: Play at home and play in school...If they play at home it depends...if the game is like umm...actually all these, to me its depends on parents actually whatever games they play. Sometimes the parents choose what they play and what not except play like 'hide and seek'; they can play anywhere if it's the same anyway. But if the parents choose a proper game like educational games, I think it's the same, even that when they are in school, they mix with their friends. Umm... may be the teachers'implement (sic) of the curriculum, which can help them describe their playing at the same time they are learning. So may be the teachers can concentrate better than the parents (*can*) because the parents sometimes they work and they won't be able to concentrate on that.

Q7 MB: Can you give your opinion if I suggest that we should cover all elements of the pre-school curriculum through play? Do you agree?

P28PH: Through play...umm...if good enough I think I'll agree because play is...I meant to me is totally alone if it is educational and can lead them and then they can...up to the extent they would be able to read, and count and everything through a game. Good enough. Yeah.

Appendix N

Examples of Administrators' Data Transcription

(A Principal from Private Pre-school)

Reminder: The first question was dropped out from this transcription because it was only something regarding pre-school background and not meant to be analysed.

Q2 MB: Do you have a particular philosophy regarding the education of pre-school children?

P14: Basic philosophy, my motive 'la', to build my own what you called "anak-anak Melayu" (Malay children) to be more educated, to be more exposure and then to be at current trend but a very good fees. I want very much my children when they entered XXX (the name of the pre-school) they progress well. Once they are out from XXX their foundation very good for them to prepare themselves in incoming years.

MB: the main philosophy?

PR14: XXX is the best partner (for the children)

MB: How was it decided upon?

PR14: What I see... something to me... if you go somewhere else for examples Kajang area even Ampang area, some centres you can see ... the condition is bad; they have money but they are not generous to buy things for children. But to me, they are children and they have to get that exposure as early as possible. Some of my friends asked me, "*you provided for them even computers and you charged them only MR 120?*". I said no... the children, they have to get the best from me. Even some schools (private) but the children who can pay for gymnastic only can enter the centre. For me, never mind, I paid a sum to my gymnastic teacher for her instruction but all the children are getting the benefit. I want the benefit for all our Malay children. I'm a bit nationalist...(laughter)

MB: In XXX' philosophy, is there any mention about the value or role of play in children's learning?

P14: Sort of yes...value of... Ok, actually before... we have that combination of learning through fun, fun through learning. We have that now also because even when we duting (sic) with children we always want them to understand why having it done in a very interest way, you know. So that, it will capture the interest more...aha...

Q3 MB: Do you have any particular curriculum guidelines...?

PR14: Umm... we are using Ministry of Education Curriculum, 3R, writing, reading, arithmetic, right? We put priority on that 3R, reading, writing and counting. And other things like other subjects such as Islamic Education, we put it in our curriculum. So that it be through our daily life 'la'. I put on some way...

MB: Is that the particular curriculum written by Ministry of Education?

PR14: Umm...books ...that has been continuously written and then approved by Education Department. But, yet, there are so many books but me, as a principal, I have to find out the best in the market. Ha...you have to find, you have to search the best book in the market. Previously, at one time I took books from Singapore because I find that English, Singapore's English is very good. Before, it's quite difficult to get the books but now it's quite easy when I get a new chance to go to Singapore and then much of our English was upgraded so, ok

MB: Is that means that your guidelines are Singapore's?

PR14: No, not the whole curriculum. Only English. But now I strengthen my English like I'm using special package for English "Smart Reader". It is more sort of... towards children that very hard to recognise and use English.

MB: So, how well do you think the teachers understand the content of the curriculum?

PR14: Ok. In every age group we have different exercises for the children and different level of books we have...Like in level age 4, they have numbers of things they should have followed. This one we already fixed it. It is under (sic) Ministry of Education Curriculum. Then, level 5, level 6...different kind of level and the interaction between each level group are different. Like me when I teach level 6, 6 years old right, um...my way of teaching is totally different from 5. 5 years (old) teacher they are more lenient, they are more casual than 6. But they are less casual than 4. The 4 is casual but much lesser than 3 in a context whereby we must have play and learn, learn through play.

MB: Do you think that your teachers know how to carry out the curriculum?

PR14: Um...ok. My set teachers they need to be trained by me. For fresh teacher, surely I have to train them before the school or term ...during the classroom teaching and even after the classroom I have to tell them this, this and this...what they suppose to know and what I should inform them...

MB: So, how about the parents. Do you have a printed statement for parents about what you intend the school to teach the children?

PR14: Um...ok...exposure for parents...yes this my...one of my... Exposure is less...less. May be we put more on...like once a year we will be having a party, ok this is what we have it here...then we have question and answer session and during that day it sort of Kindergarten open day ...umm parents' day and then we give them children's report card, we have that kind of... But to me umm...parents to me, if they

have problem or we have problem with the children we interact immediately. We don't wait for so long.

Q4. MB: Umm...ok. Could you comment generally on current teachers' teaching style in the pre-school classroom?

PR14: Ok, umm...to me umm...ok. We should be more friendly with the children. Friendly in away, friendly with intentionally 'la', you want the children to be more behave, intend the children to be...could follow the instruction very well, that teacher should know, at least umm...70 to 80 percent what the child needs.

MB: So is that what your teachers' style in this pre-school?

PR14: Yeah, should be 'la'. But I have to identify...

MB: How about the activities ...classroom activities for the children...

PR14: Umm... activities in the classroom, ok umm...like what I said, we have... when we interact with the children we also... I do some story telling within the session... - as what people said 'the interval' -, we do story telling. We also do singing in the class. Without that singing period we also do singing interval and then we have some stories that have good meaning; moral stories.

MB: Ok, how about the grouping of children in the classroom?

PR14: Grouping? Um... we here we combine. We don't sit them single 'lah'. We prefer them to sit with others. Means one table shared by five you know because I believe in-group study, that's the reason. I don't believe in single ... no.

MB: How did you group the children? Is that based on their achievement or...

PR14: Ok for our first side...first side of the group of children, we sit them anyway that they feel like to sit. After we have observed them, then we re-sit them...for me yeah, in 6 years, I re-sit them according to their weakness. For example, I don't keep them umm...among the weakness person. A weak child I sit with some clever one you know, so that at least they can he can motivate himself to be as good as the other. Aha...

MB: What do you think about the learning style of children?

PR14: Learning style? Very good, very good they are very good. To me they are very good... (Laughter) you know, then they have open question like ok for example, "What do you see at the beach? What you can see under the water?" Even under the sea. Sort of things... some story that you just find... you know... imagine...that kind. When we throw open question is that...we also have open question session, you know, beside our basic question when we throw question. Let say, we talk about family and when I asked how many mother do you have? One of them said "two mothers", we never think/ imagine about that and then he said, "*You know, I got*

mother and my auntie I call mother too, My mother I called mama and my auntie I called mama something... ”

MB: How about physical lay out of the classroom?

PR14: Here is not sufficient enough... (Laughing). Actually this column, “Bacalah Sayang” (Read it darling) is sort of... session to them learning phonetics... and the up there is my solar system. I made it already. This one is my really concern about English and we do it ‘la’. Ha, this 6 years old classroom.

MB: How about corners...play corners...

PR14: Actually this corner why it is like this, because I don’t expect the children to play. I like them to touch and...you know, they go and take in the cupboard, they can touch...although it seems not tidy ...I like them to touch and say...if I go to another kindergarten which might well-display...the principle much defensive with the children...not touch this and that. Even my books, reading corner we have it there and we also have it here. They take books and put it back but I now sometimes it is not arranged ... (they play) during the recess hour and we have our rest time from 9.30 to 10.00, right! Half and hour they will play. They will play in the classroom...

Q5 MB: In your opinion as a principal, do you think play is important for their development?

PR14: Oh, yes, very important.

MB: To what extent?

PR14: Umm, play...playing is not that play. That plays in bracket. They play as they learn. They learn through playing. They must play while learning. Singing is part of playing also. Umm...playing blocks is also part of playing through learning. Let say, a 3 years old child, so when we have that block session for children, how they can line up the block in a single colour; in two colours, in different colours. How they can umm... make shapes into block. They have ... they learned but through play. We have last year theme, learn through play whereas I’m a committee of “OMEP”. Last year, “OMEP” theme is learn through play...we went to the seminar; many delegates from Korea, Africa, Singapore ... we met in KL, PWTC. From so many countries actually...

MB: Umm...do you think play should be an integral part of pre-school program?

PR14: Yes... even for 6 years. We have to have it because children like to play. But indirectly they are learning.

Q6 **MB:** Ok, let's go to what we called as 'play'. What did you understand by the word 'play' personally?

PR14: Play...ok if you look through dictionary play is "main" you know, something to do with activity done by the child that made the child happy, you know, play something even with the ball or even with the rock, play...something that children like to do.

MB: Do you think that play has any value, role, purpose...

PR14: yes! Ok...when you play, the value, right, ok. The value of play, for example, I'm talking about "air" right, ok. If you tell the children that air is "udara" (atmosphere) there's no sort things, activity to done; they actually don't understand well but if you right in the place for example you blow balloon and start relive the air, you put something in the balloon, let them blow and you relive the thing like small cards, put into the balloon, they see with their own eyes; the paper cards are coming out from the balloon... like we play the parachute...that is part of play but directly it's tell them that is 'air'. 6 years, let say I did experiment with them...Experiment is play, isn't it?... Candle in a bottle...

MB: So, what is your own view of play in relation to children's learning then? Is it the appropriate way in teaching young children?

PR14: Umm...to me play is part of children's learning but... it cannot be...It cannot be a play to classroom 'la'. It cannot be a play to classroom but certain area like science, you can did them through play but certain time you have to be umm...quite serious 'lah' because in future time they must have that - as what people said- some period, they can play some period they cannot play. That kind of...if all the time, it's quite difficult. Certain things you can. Not all the time.

Q7 **MB:** Ok. How long is your experience as a pre-school principal?

PR14: This coming 13 years...

MB: Ok, frankly speaking, would you like to have play to be incorporated in your particular pre-school classrooms?

PR14: Play is part of the ... (Nodding her head)

MB: So, have you taken any steps to prepare for the appropriate play environment for the children?

PR14: We have. Umm... for example we have our play corner. So called activity corners. Umm...before we have our sand play but now I remove it because of cat's pooh and also we have water play... But after some times, we feel fed up and we take them out ... in the classroom, I have my farm corner; we have our park corner you know... (Interrupted by a ringing phone)

MB: So, what steps so far has been taken for the purpose of implementing play in the classroom?

PR14: Even you see my carpet... there are ... (laughter) and then I have also my little shop corner and then my cooking corner, my play doll corner. That's why I prefer that play...

Q8 MB: Ok, do you have any suggestion how play can suit your pre-school principles in the aspect of implementation...

PR14: Ok, I would prefer 'la', I would prefer umm...beside of pre-school, we have a play corner in pre-school classes. I think umm... in primary 1, at least, we should have that corner; science corner, reading corner...right now, classroom they are too big with people in the class about 40 in the classroom, too big, a lesser go we have small area ...

Q9 MB: Well, at the end I would like to ask you about your vision...

PR14: Oh...my vision is very big. I would like to have my foundation... (Laughing) Foundation one thing, to help up my children... I mean my own children up from this centre and also unlucky children. If let say I have that foundation and those children are 'graduated' from XXX, to build simply that... if I'm not here anymore...you know the same motive that I have...the best for Malay children (Laughing). It's quite difficult to achieve...but ...if I could get the first number of lucky draw, the first thing in my mind, the foundation site, I have a big school at least one room for those parents who did not enough money to send their children to quality school...I take that children. I like to help that children (sic). That's why sometimes when I talked to parents who registered their child in the nursery (disable children), I always want to help that child ... I must help, indirectly I'm helping them. We have to have that intention...XXX must grow...but to me when the children come to my place they should have that self-reliance. My teachers they are not coach them but they can cope with the children. I let the parents to help me up ...because if we educated the children with self-reliance, when they grow big ...they have already know their principle in life...

Appendix O

Policy Maker's Responses

Appendix P

Letters of Endorsement

Kajian Teachers and Parents' Understanding of the Concept of Play in Child Development and Education and Its Impact on the Practicality of Learning through Play Experiences in Malaysian Preschools

1. What is the main philosophy or goal guiding the form of early childhood programme in Malaysia?
 - *Are there particular people (e.g., theorists) disciplines, experiences, or events which have strongly influenced early childhood practice?*

The early childhood education (ECE) is based on the national education philosophy, which, at the individual level, is to exploit the full potential of the child in a holistic and integrated manner so as to create a harmonious and balanced person in their intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects. At the macro national level, the goal is to create educated, skillful and responsible citizens who will contribute to the prosperity of a harmonious society. These broad objectives are brought down to the child level by exposing them to several elements, which can foster the individual development and lay the foundation of the desired national development. The main elements that will be incorporated into the early childhood programme are the cognitive, creative, socio-emotional, moral and spiritual, language and communication and physical needs.

In developing ECE, we are cognizant of our religious belief, hence, we incorporated Islamic intellectual thought and thinking such as Ibn Khaldun, Imam al-Ghazali, and Sayyidina Umar Al-Khatab. At the same time, we also refer to the child development theory developed by Piaget, Vygotsky, Montessori, and Maslow.

Conversely, we could say that there is no particular theory or basis of the childhood programme but it developed rather naturally depending on the origin of

the preschool programme, which was mainly outside the formal schooling system. The community childhood programme was organized to provide some basic education for the rural children. On the other hand, the Integration Childhood education (Tadika Perpaduan) is organized for urban children of lower socio economic status. The private kindergartens were organized mainly for the urban children to provide a head start to the concerned parents and some were trying the Montessori method, the multiple intelligent method (Nuri) or the fast reading method. The religious preschool instructions with some secular education added on to it. The formal education for the preschool programme was attempted by the Ministry of Education in the Preschool Annex. Based on this existing diverse practice in childhood programme, the Ministry had formulated a comprehensive curriculum for preschool education where the National Education Philosophy is being integrated into it. We can say that the diverse, multi method approach of preschool education in Malaysia is now being streamlined into the Malaysian early childhood programme.

2. Generally, what is your view about the quality link between play and learning?

- *What is your opinion about implementing learning through play approach in preschool education?*

At the early childhood stage, most of the activities are considered as play by the adults and are accepted by the child, thus, the statement, "it is only child play". These natural characteristics of "play" activity in the child should not be stopped in the process of teaching and educating them but it should be fully exploited and utilized to facilitate learning. Any attempt to go against their natural tendencies will result in resistance and will jeopardize the learning process. The psychological rejection of serious learning environments will definitely retard the learning process. Therefore, we should mobilize and utilize this natural tendency in the child to benefit the learning process. In fact, the learning theory play method had been propagated and encourage by learning educationist and

writers such as Moyles, J.R (1989), Desforjes (1989), and Nigel Hall and Lesley Abbot (1991).

However, in most Malaysian preschool institutions, the whole teaching and learning process and the material had become very formal. This is the result of the misunderstanding that early childhood education as "going to school (formal education) at an early age" and not as what should be correctly viewed as "the education for early childhood level". As such, parents, teachers and society will expect the child to master the basic three R's; Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic at an early age. They forget the natural tendency of the child to play but subject them to formal education and assessed them on the test and examination results. As such, the child missed their childhood days and missed their opportunity to learn through their childhood capabilities. This misconception needs to be rectified so that the early childhood education will be more enjoyable and full of learning experience. Thus, when designing the preschool curriculum, the MOE in particular, the Curriculum Development Center (CDC) has incorporated the elements of play into the curriculum e.g., playing with buttons or leaves to understand the basic concept of numbers. The curriculum is designed to inculcate a positive learning atmosphere and a play-oriented manner in which the preschool child learns best.

- *To what extent have play materials been provided for government-funded preschool?*

In line with the concept of play and learning, the MOE has taken the initiative to furnish the government-funded preschool with play equipment. At the school playground or outside the classroom play equipment such as swings, see-saws, slides, sand play, water play, play hut, tunnel, *rangka memanjat*, and *papan timbangan* are built. The play materials that are provided in the classroom is comprised of blocks, beads and buttons, animal counters, and weighing apparatuses with weights. The MOE ascertained that these play materials follow

the MOE's specification such as preschool children's' age, physical, and safety. In addition, this play psychomotor equipment enhances children's development of cognitive and social skills; and it is through this process of play and learning that the preschool children not only grows and learns in a nurturing but also a challenging environment.

3. I read from the news that there is a new national preschool curriculum. Are you satisfied with the present development?

Yes, I am satisfied with the present national preschool curriculum because it is in line with the new curriculum. In fact, the New Preschool Curriculum was formulated by a group of child development experts from various universities in Malaysia, curriculum developers, private kindergartens, and NGOs. These people are also the stakeholders who are responsive to the changing needs of the society and for national development.

- *To what extent will the content of the new curriculum fulfill the need of child development?*

With regard to the curriculum content of the New Preschool Curriculum, these experts (i.e., curriculum developers and so forth) ascertain that the curriculum content incorporates Language Development and Communication, Cognitive Development, Spiritual and Moral Development, Physical Development, Socioemotional Development, and Creativity and Aesthetical Development as aspired in our National Education Philosophy. It is vital that a child at this tender age be given a holistic approach to learning and the MOE is providing preschool children with a good foundation of all the basic skills which they need before they progress to Year 1 of formal schooling.

- *Is this curriculum has something to do with learning through play approach?*

As mentioned earlier, this new curriculum uses learning through play approach. For example, to make a child aware of the environment and the need to preserve by synthesizing the tree and plants around the school by making a small garden and watering the plants. In other words, the teacher does not lecture, drill or force them to do worksheets but emphasizes more on hands-on activities. This strategy is in line with Piaget's child's development theory, i.e. from concrete to abstract thinking, which goes well with children at this age. At the same time, by combining these activities, these children will be able to enjoy a wonderful learning experience.

- *How can teachers practice this notion?*

I believe that our preschool teachers do not have any problems to practice the concept of learning through play approach because they are being trained before implementing the curriculum.¹⁾

- *Why are preschool children in Malaysia usually being taught in a formal way?*

To my understanding, in the past, MOE provided a preschool curriculum guideline to government and non-government agencies for them to conduct ECE. This guideline focused on a very structured teaching-learning method. Our current preschool children are not taught in a formal way. Teachers are trained to understand the philosophy of early childhood education. And as mentioned earlier, the MOE always emphasized learning through play for ECE, i.e. using a learning style that is in the context of the child developmental stage. In addition, as outlined in the New Preschool Curriculum, children's activities are carefully structured to incorporate learning elements and experience, which should result in the child deriving the maximum benefit from it. On the other hand,

unstructured and unorganized classroom play will only result in chaos in the classroom with no learning experience or benefit to the child.

4. What attempts have so far been made to improve pre-school teachers professionalism?

With regard to preschool teacher professionalism, MOE is cognizant the importance of quality improvement of professional development among preschool teachers because their role is crucial for the foundation years of early childhood education. MOE has taken necessary steps to improve preschool teachers professionalism such as:

- Since 1996, MOE has upgrade teacher-training courses from certificate level to diploma level (including pre-school teacher's certificate). As of January 2002, there are about 1,020 candidates who are enrolled in pre-service programme at various teacher-training colleges;
- The MOE, in particular, the Teacher Training Division has conducted formative evaluation or reviewed of their pre-school teacher's curriculum for pre-service and in-service programmes. In fact, in November 2001, the curriculum was reviewed and changes were made to ensure that the curriculum content is in line with the demand of the changing society;
- In service pre-school teachers are given the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and skills through in-service courses (e.g. KSPK – One Year Specialist Course, 14 Week Course, and short courses). Our projection for in-service courses for preschool teacher shows in the year 2002, about 840 trained teachers will undergo an in-service course of 14 Week course (February intake is about 420 teachers and July intake is about 420 teachers);

- Curriculum Development Centre has trained trainers and key personnel to implement the National Pre-school Curriculum effectively. By using the Cascade Model or the Multiplier Effect, these trainers and key personnel will impart the knowledge and skills to pre-school teachers under the government-funded preschool. It is hoped that through this Cascade Model, all preschool teachers will enhance their knowledge and skills on ECE and be able to nurture and provide quality education for preschool children.
- *Do you think that pre-school teachers in Malaysia have appropriate training and continuing professional development ? Why ?*

Again, I would like to reaffirm that our preschool teachers are given appropriate training before they embarked themselves upon teaching preschool children. This training is pertinent because preschool children are at their tender age; as such, we have to use a lot of psychology when educating these preschool children. Thus, it is crucial for preschool teachers to acquire necessary skills i.e., child psychology, creative, and fun teaching because a child gains a very positive and happy introduction to education.

As mentioned earlier, MOE has constantly reviewed the training of preschool teachers and the current teacher-training curriculum is based on the National Preschool Curriculum, 2001. At the same time, there are opportunities for preschool teachers to further their studies in preschool education with bachelor's degree at the University of Malaya.

- *Why did the government terminate the Diploma for pre-school teacher education programme?*

The government did not terminate the Diploma for pre-school teacher education. The government is putting it 'on hold' due to unavoidable circumstances. In fact,

MOE recruiting 1,020 candidates for pre-school course at the Diploma level this year.

5. What are the problems facing the MOE in implementing the new preschool curriculum to the whole type preschool?

The MOE has developed the National Preschool Curriculum, the Curriculum Specification and the Teaching-Learning Strategies that will be made available to all operators. We have done all the training necessary so that teachers should not face with too much problems and/or difficulties. So far we do not receive any feedback that our preschool teachers are facing difficulties in putting theory into practice. I foresee that there should be no problem in terms of resources. Nevertheless, should there be any difficulties arising, the Ministry will provide all the necessary assistance to help them overcome the problem.

In terms of classroom practice, the success of the curriculum depends on the creativity and 'maturity' of the teachers; how they interpret, plan, think and integrate the contents of the curriculum to give children quality experience and provide the children with the opportunity to practice the skills they have acquired in the more formal aspects of their lives. I would like to emphasize it is not the way in which the curriculum is described but the context in which learning activities are presented, the role of the teacher as instructor, the social and communicative competencies of the children which will affect their responses to the taught curriculum.

- *What attempts have so far been made to design a 'good role model' of government-funded preschool?*

We have not been able to identify yet any government-funded preschool which can be made a 'good role model'. One of the major causes is the physical aspect and the weaknesses in its maintenance. However, we have asked every

state education department to identify one school to develop a model classroom as benchmark for other schools to follow. This will include best classroom practices and teaching and learning materials which other teachers can emulate.

6. Is the government planning other development in addition to the new preschool curriculum? What efforts have so far been taken by the government?

From 2002-2007, it is estimated that about 192,500 will be attending preschool. 1131 classes have implemented preschool program and the Ministry ensures that these preschools are provided with adequate infrastructure as outlined in the curriculum. In addition, training, both at preservice and in-service levels were conducted to assure that the Ministry does not have the shortage of qualified preschool teachers. Moreover, reports from School Inspectorate (2000) indicate that MOE has the capability of providing quality preschool programme as compared to other preschool programme provided by other government agencies. Parents with children at government-funded preschools have to pay less tuition fees i.e., RM115.00 yearly; as compared to KEMAS RM345.00, Jabatan Perpaduan Negara RM215.00, and RM2, 610.00 at private institution. Thus, in years to come, I could foresee that the government-funded preschool will be as one of the favorable alternatives for quality preschool education. Consecutively, the Ministry is taking the initiative to provide preschool education to disadvantage children in rural areas. This is to provide quality education for all and in line with our Malaysia Education Blueprint to ensure access, equity, and quality in education.

- *Concerning the financing/funding, what are some estimates for providing early childhood education services to all families who wish to enroll their children?*

In an effort to provide democratization of education for ECE, in 1994 the Ministry has formulated guidelines to enroll children into government-funded preschool. Our focus is to provide ECE for children from lower-income families regardless of

their locality i.e. rural and urban areas. In addition, educational research and evaluation conducted by EPRD, in 1994 and 1996; the findings revealed that there is a relationship between education and poverty. Thus, it is imperative that we provide ECE for disadvantaged children because they are the assets for nation building.

Some of the criteria for the selection of children from lower income families in the rural areas are:

- priority is given to families whose aggregate income is less than RM405.00 per month
- aggregate family income is less than RM700.00 but with five children
- children from aggregate family income of more than RM700.00 will be considered provided there is a vacancy

For lower income family in urban areas, the criteria is as follows:

- priority is given to families whose aggregate income is less than RM700.00 per month
- aggregate family income is less than RM1000.00 but with five children
- children from aggregate family income of more than RM1000.00 will be considered provided there is a vacancy

- *Do you think that the budget for early years education should be expended?
Why?*

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With regard to the budget for ECE, I think that the budget should be expanded so that we can provide continuous quality ECE. Under the 7th Malaysian Plan (1996-2000) we have allocated RM107 million for preschool programme; and we knew that this amount was not sufficient for the implementation of the preschool programme. As such, under the 8th Malaysian Plan (2001-2005), the Ministry

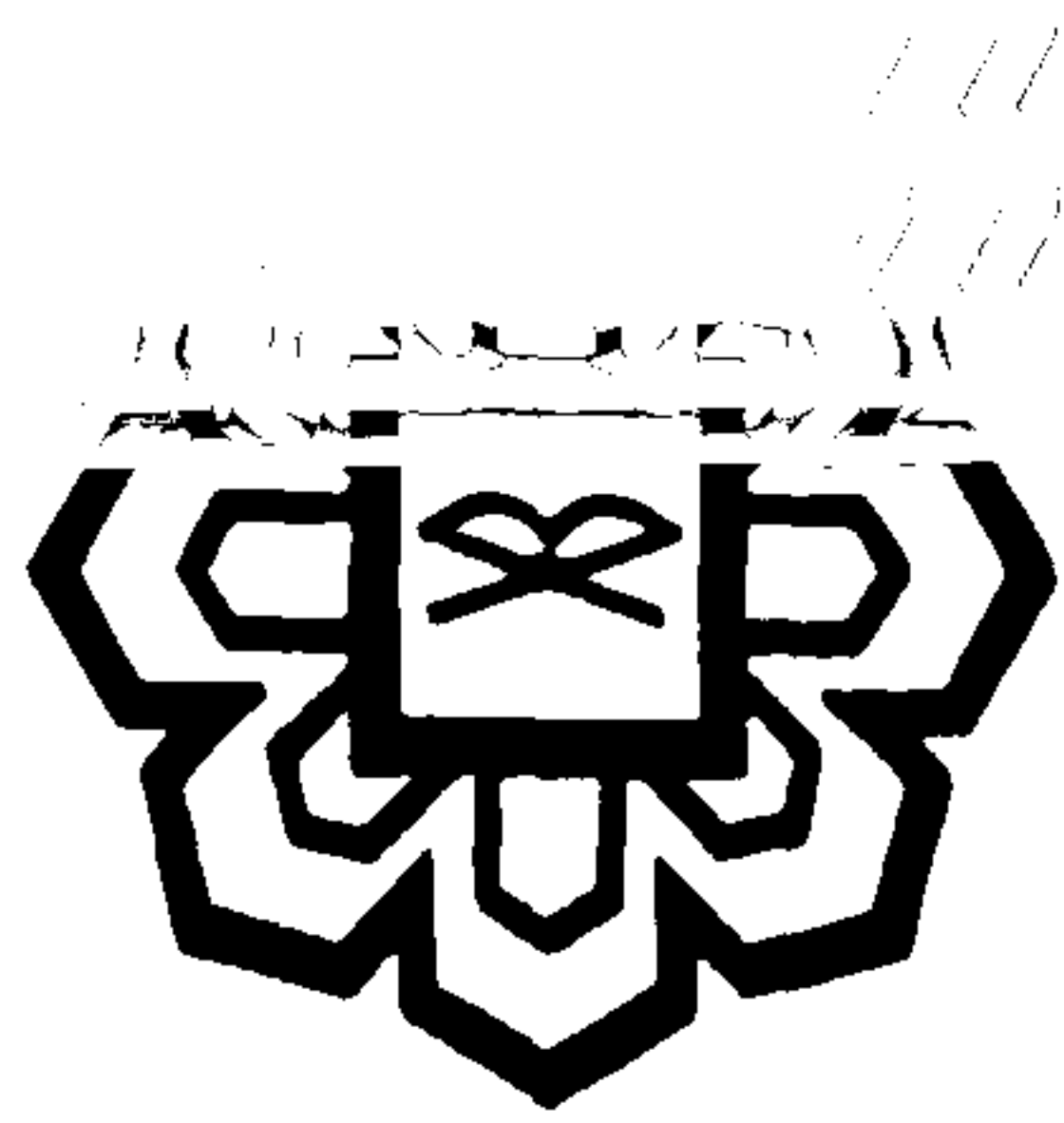
has increased the budget for preschool programme to provide access, equity, and quality in education. In addition, the Ministry will enhance its role in the coordination of preschool programmes for children in the 5-6 cohort to ensure that its coverage is expanded from 63.7 percent in 2000 to at least 75 percent by 2005.

7. At the end, what is your vision of early childhood education in Malaysia?

The Ministry of Education believes that citizens should be given quality education as early age as possible. The pre-school age is the best stage to nurture quality education because this is the foundation stage to develop their talent, creativity, intellectual capabilities, and inculcate positive values. This ECE need to be culturally appropriate and designed to promote the optimal development of all children including those with disabilities and other special needs; to raise the standard of preparation for children development guided by a dynamic philosophy of education that is flexible and responsive to the human needs in a changing society; and to enhance the learning and value acquisition to the fulfillment of every child's potential. It is hoped that preschool children are nurtured and taught to acquire a wide range of skills in a secure, stimulating, and challenging environment. At the same time, they learn to live together in a multi ethnic society and respect other cultural and religious beliefs guided by RUKUNEGARA and our national Education Philosophy.

We hope that both the government and private agencies can meet the need for preschool education in Malaysia, provide standards for other preschools to follow so that the quality of preschool education is standard throughout the country. We also see that by providing access and equity in preschool programmes i.e. starting with 100 classes in 2002, then 1500 in 2003 and the same number in every school year will enable children who cannot otherwise afford ECE to attend preschool. In this way, we will be able to narrow the gap between the rural and urban children and provide equal opportunities for quality education.

In essence, the education for early childhood is like laying the foundation for the future development of the child, which is basis for manpower and intellectual development of the a nation. Therefore, we should place more emphasis on this since the laying of a shaky educational foundation will result in a shaky in a shaky intellectual development, which will inevitably adversely affect the future economic, political, and social development of a nation. Therefore, the investment in human capital is an important aspect of human resource development and in fostering the k-based economy and the rapid growth of ICT in e-society.



(Company No. 101067-P)

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CENTRE FOR LANGUAGES AND PRE-UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT (CELPAD)

Our Reference:

Rujukan Kami:

Date:

Tarikh:


5th March 2002

To Whom It May Concern

MASTURA BADZIS

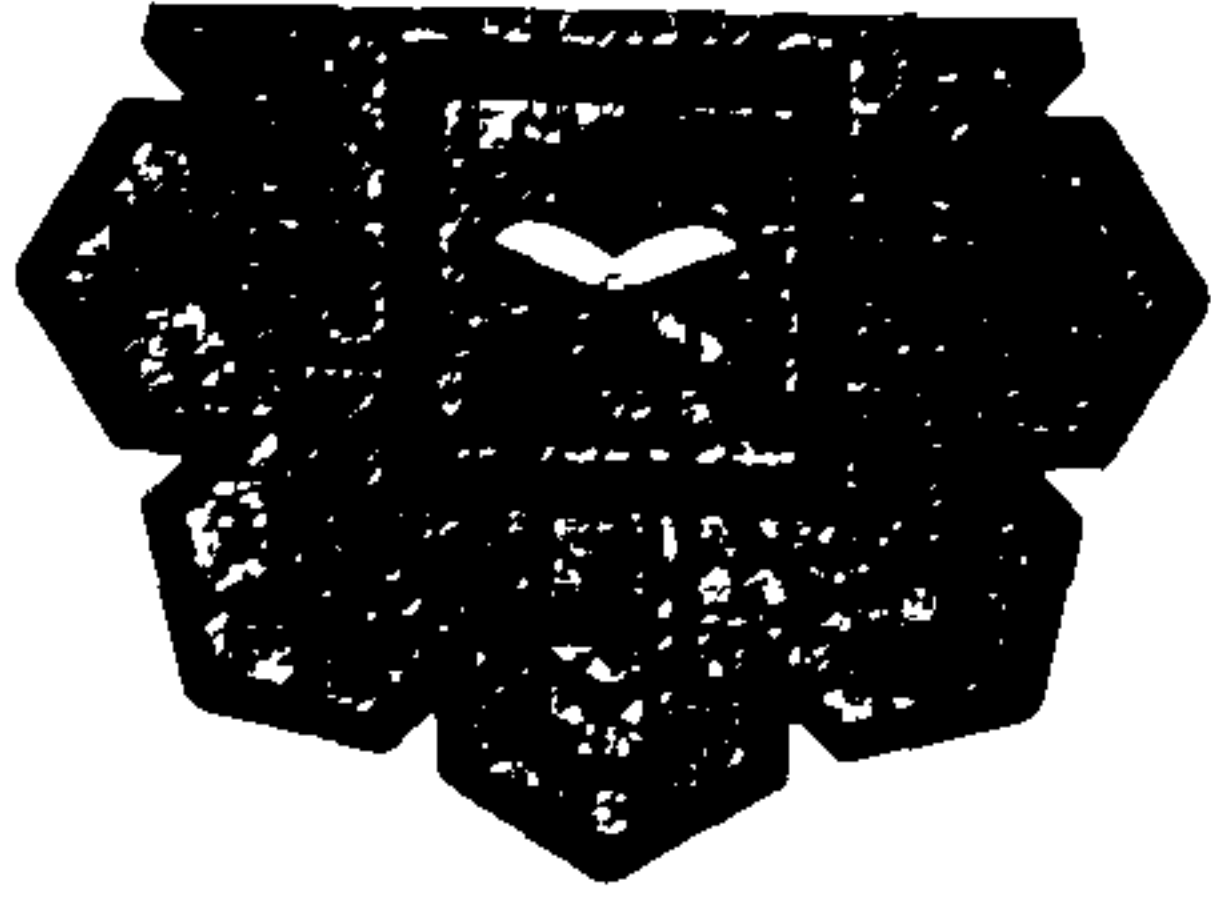
This is to certify that the Malay version of the interview questions on the subject of *"Teachers and Parents' Understanding on the Concept of Play in Child Development and Education"* attached herewith is appropriate and in accordance with the English version. It conveys the original message of the interviews and has met the standard of Malay language translation.

Yours truly,


.....
(HJ. AZMI ABDUL MUTALIB)

Malay Language Specialist/Translation

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Sincerely,

.....
(DR. ISMAIL SHEIKH AHMAD)

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